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AUTHOR Freedman, Marc
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ABSTRACT

This essay discusses the roots, current shapes, and social and operational implications of mentoring young people in poverty. After an introductory first section on mentoring and the new voluntarism, Section II, "Recurring Fervor," notes recent increased interest in mentoring and traces the early manifestations of mentoring to 19th Century "friendly visiting" campaigns. Section III, "From Mythology to Policy," describes various cultural permutations of the role of the mentor. Section IV, "The New Wave of Mentoring," describes currently operating mentor programs at the state, local, and private levels. Section V, "Exploring Mentoring's Rise," traces the current social causes for the mentoring movement's rise. Section VI, "Great Expectations," looks critically at the movement's great fervor and high expectations. Section VII, "A Modest Intervention," explores actual possible accomplishments through a review of research results and insights from mentors themselves. Section VIII, "Mentoring's Crossroads," considers the gap between enthusiasm for the concept and the modest results and current lack of infrastructure. Section IX, "Implications of Mentoring," discusses the long-term importance of the movement for poor and disadvantaged youth and its implications for raising other societal issues. A list of 128 notes arranged by chapter heading is included. (JB)

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The Kindness of Strangers

Reflections on the Mentoring Movement

by Marc Freedman

Fall 1991

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FOREWORD

Initiatives to improve the prospects of America's young people generally come in two forms: broad statements of policy intentions intended to apply to large numbers (if not all) youth, and concrete programs that, in fact, help a few youth. The two approaches are not necessarily inconsistent, and should be complementary: to be effective, statements of principle need vehicles of implementation, and action should be founded on well-articulated policy. But over the past several decades, we have seen a widening gap between intentions and action; the increasing number of youth with poor prospects for a good life is a result.

Occasionally, an idea comes along that seems to offer a better prospect of closing the gap. It simultaneously captures the imagination of policy thinkers and implementers, and the broader public that wants wide-scale action under an appealing banner--now.

Mentoring is such an idea. It has literally burst over the policy, popular and program worlds in the past decade as a way to assist large numbers of youth, especially those least likely to achieve success. As this report documents, many prominent Americans have publicly stated that mentoring is the gap-filler all Americans have been seeking, and that all Americans can bring about.

Public/Private Ventures' usual approach to its mission of assisting youth with poor prospects is to test the viability and effectiveness of a concrete, operating program that reflects a broader policy or theory. This focus on the actual is meant to inform wider, ongoing debates over social policy or direction--to help tie them to reality. We are pursuing this approach with mentoring through the following projects: a study of the effectiveness and content of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program as it operates in 16 cities; a study of the usefulness of college students as mentors for middle-school students at risk of failure, a project of the Campus Partners in Learning program sponsored by Campus Compact; assessments of the "I Have A Dream" tuition-guarantee and mentoring programs in Washington, D.C., and the Scholarship-in-Escrow program sponsored by business and philanthropy in Cleveland; an evaluation of the use of older citizens as mentors for at-risk youth, through Temple University's national Linking Lifetimes program; and mentoring demonstrations in Georgia and Missouri, operated by those states' juvenile justice systems. Our hope is that these studies and demonstrations will inform consideration of mentoring as an idea, a policy and a course of action.

Mentoring's wide and intense appeal as an idea and a practice also seemed to call for an overall look, one that could place it in social and historical context; map the basic forms and struc-

tures it was taking in its early, high growth years; and explore the roots of its appeal, and the potential and limitations those roots offered. Our intent here was in part to provide context for the more specific studies P/PV will complete over the next few years. We also feared that mentoring's explosive growth might doom it to the fate of many cures for social ills that capture the social imagination: a comet-like appearance and disappearance, with careful studies coming too late to shape the actual and more realistic usefulness of the idea. Our experience has led us to believe that mentoring is useful, though we cannot yet gauge with accuracy its limits or forms.

Marc Freedman's study, The Kindness of Strangers, is our attempt to take a look at the roots, current shapes, and social and operational implications of mentoring. It is speculative, in the sense that it is not based on the program-based realities and effects we typically examine. The study's speculations do illuminate mentoring's possibilities and limitations, and in doing so, remind us that commitment, realism, resources, imagination and thoughtfulness are all required for real progress in assisting larger numbers of youth toward successful lives, and that those qualities--even under a popular banner like mentoring--are not easily brought together. The study concludes that under popular banners like mentoring lie important truths, with important possibilities if only we will take the time and effort to dig them out and carry them out.

Michael A. Bailin
President

Gary Walker
Executive Vice President

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"The chief need of the poor today is not almsgiving, but the moral support of true friendship."

Rev. S. Humphrey Gurteen, leader of the Friendly Visiting campaigns, 1882.[1]

"What the boys want is friends, not charity."

Ernest Coulter, founder, Big Brothers, Good Housekeeping, 1909.[2]

"Millions of kids across the country are starving, but they're not hungry for a balanced meal. They're starved for adult attention."

One PLUS One, Newsletter, 1990.[3]

I. MENTORING AND THE NEW VOLUNTARISM

Periodically, Americans rediscover the poor and set out to help them. In the 1960s, our concern found expression in the War on Poverty; 30 years earlier, it was manifest in the New Deal and its programs on behalf of the disenfranchised.

As this country entered the 1990s, many were envisioning another wave in America's cyclical response to poverty. Historian and former Kennedy advisor Arthur Schlesinger noted the existence of "a lot of pent-up idealism" and predicted: "That will increase, and in the 1990s, we'll enter a phase that will be much like the 1930s and 1960s." Eminent analysts all along the political spectrum echoed Schlesinger's forecast.[4]

Yet the new decade shows few signs of another campaign against poverty; prospects for a second New Deal or War on Poverty seem remote. When President Bush convened his Domestic Policy Council in 1991 to consider a set of sweeping anti-poverty measures, it was decided, in the words of one member, "to keep playing with the same toys," only "paint them a little shinier." As this participant explained, "We didn't have any cash."[5]

While eschewing anti-poverty crusades and the expenditure of significant government dollars to eradicate poverty, the Reagan and Bush administrations have propounded the virtues of voluntarism. Ronald Reagan complained: "We've let government take away many things we once considered were really ours to do voluntarily out of the goodness of our hearts."[6] The Bush administration coined its signature domestic policy phrase: "a thousand points of light."

After taking office, President Bush set up a White House office to promote voluntarism and supported creation of the Points of Light Foundation, a private foundation dedicated to advancing voluntary efforts to solve social problems. Arguing that "millions of essentially good people are enduring a waking nightmare of want and isolation," the Foundation states that what these "Americans need most is not another government program, but a set of meaningful relationships that results in the conviction that their future is not limited by their present circumstances."[7] In 1991, the Foundation helped to promulgate a hit country song built around the refrain, "All it takes is a point of light."[8]

Reiterating the exclusivity of voluntarism and government programs, the President argued in May 1991 that what America needs today is "the good society," one based on private acts of charity. He contrasted this vision with that of the Great Society, which he said discouraged good deeds and individual responsibility. Indeed, President Bush elected to make this speech at the University of Michigan, where Lyndon Johnson had announced 27

years earlier that: "We have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society," and to eradicate poverty "in our time."[9]

The points of light notion carries with it an intuitive appeal that transcends traditional political categories. But the call for private action in the context of government inaction and the advancement of dramatic claims for voluntarism as an instrument for ameliorating the "waking nightmare of want and isolation" have also given rise to sharp negative reaction.

One critic derides the "thousand pointless lights," while another refers to the "1,000 points of lite." An editorial scoffs: "The President seems to think that legions of volunteers, acting in government's stead, will swarm over the ghettos and mop up urban ills"; another asserts that voluntarism, as espoused by the Reagan and Bush administrations, "asks the private sector to fill gaps created by American capitalism and vacated by a retreating federal government"--a strategy the author equates with leaving "the war on poverty in the hands of vigilantes."[10]

In short, the debate over voluntarism's proper role appears stuck in rhetorical wrangling. On the one side, voluntary action is treated as a panacea for complex and long-standing social problems. In reaction, voluntarism is summarily dismissed and lampooned.

This essay attempts to clarify the real potential and implications of the new interest in voluntarism by looking at one of its most compelling expressions: the current movement to mentor young people in poverty. Mentoring is one of the favored initiatives of the Points of Light Foundation. Indeed, that Foundation's co-chairman has established a separate One to One Foundation, focused solely on mentoring. Examining mentoring offers an opportunity to illuminate both the promise and pitfalls inherent in the "points of light" approach.

The current wave of mentoring is a particular form of voluntarism, one focusing on the poor, primarily involving the middle-class volunteers and promoting personal relationships as an instrument for helping the disadvantaged. This combination is one of the most enduring variations within our broader experience of urban reform activity.

In examining mentoring's rise as a movement, this paper will pay particular attention to a set of basic questions: What lies behind the sudden interest in mentoring? What can we realistically expect from programs that focus on one-to-one relationships? What are the mentoring movement's broader implications for public policy? What does this phenomenon say about who we are as a society?

The picture that emerges is of a complex strategy that is neither a panacea nor vigilantism, a strategy with potential to contribute directly to the cause of helping young people out of poverty, as well as one that raises timely and important issues for education and social policy. At the same time, it is a strategy whose potential contributions may well be squandered under the weight of misguided expectations.

The story presented here results from four years on the mentoring "beat": visiting programs, talking to mentors and youth, following policy debate, and reviewing literature. It rests on accumulated observations, opinions and personal reflections emerging from hundreds of interviews conducted around the country. (See the Afterword.)

While the central concern of this story is the fate of young people growing up in poverty, its major protagonists are middle-class adults--the individuals who have initiated mentoring programs, who are promoting them, and who have come forward to "do good" under often challenging circumstances.

The mentoring movement is built on the kindness of these strangers. It deserves to be taken seriously--for what it might realistically accomplish, and where it might potentially lead.

II. RECURRING FERVOR

The 1983 annual report of the Commonwealth Fund, a New York philanthropy, begins with an essay by the foundation's president, Margaret Mahoney.

Titled "Mentors," this essay argues that young people have lost "natural proximity to caring, mature adults," leaving their "basic need for constructive guidance" unfulfilled. This problem, contends Mahoney, is particularly acute for children in poverty, who, "living in scarred, deprived neighborhoods... confront too many negative influences, too many bad models." Arguing that one-to-one relationships "can reassure each child of his innate worth, instill values, guide curiosity, and encourage a purposeful life," Mahoney concludes by calling on adults in America to come forward and devote "a small but significant part" of their lives to mentoring.[1]

The Commonwealth Fund began funding mentoring projects in the early 1980s, including one called Career Explorations in New York, which focused on disadvantaged youth and matched them with mentors from the Coalition of 100 Black Women. This initiative evolved into a national demonstration project called Career Beginnings, which was soon operating, with mentoring as one component, in two dozen cities.

By the late 1980s, Margaret Mahoney's call for mentors was amplified by a growing number of prominent citizens, politicians and commissions. A particularly compelling voice within this chorus was that of Washington Post columnist Dorothy Gilliam, whose 1989 "SOS" to her readers implored them to "roll up their sleeves" and serve as their "brother's keeper" for "thousands of children reaching a crossroads."

According to Gilliam, "Several churches and organizations have started mentoring programs with an aim toward having men and women develop a regular, hands-on, one-on-one relationship with...at-risk boys and girls." However, Gilliam stressed that it was not enough to pay "lip service" to these efforts; rather they "must be doubled, even quadrupled." The solution, she wrote, lies with each adult taking responsibility for mentoring one child.[2]

Later in 1989, the William T. Grant Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship recommended "that many more mentoring programs be developed, evaluated, and refined, especially those that involve young people in ongoing relationships based on shared purpose and mutual interest."[3] At approximately the same time, President Bush taped a television commercial endorsing mentoring, and New York's First Lady, Mathilda Cuomo, declared 1989 "The Year of the Mentor."[4]

By 1990, a raft of highly influential organizations and corporations, including Chrysler, Proctor and Gamble, Goldman Sachs, IBM, Xerox, the United Way of America, the National Urban League, PBS, and the National Education Association, had thrown their support behind mentoring.

In March 1990, the first National Mentoring Conference was held, sponsored by the Commonwealth Fund, the Chrysler Corporation, and the U.S. Department of Labor. Elizabeth Dole, then Secretary of Labor, offered the keynote address. Later that year, the new One to One Foundation and the United Way of America sponsored another national conference on mentoring, with a message from the President and speeches by Jack Kemp, David Kearns and other notables from government and the private sector.

The media also took notice of mentoring. The Philadelphia Inquirer proclaimed in a 1989 editorial that mentoring had become "downright trendy," declaring that "as the Helmsley-Boesky era ends, the fresh interest in youth is a reason for hope."[5] The New York Times described "an enormous surge" in mentoring programs, observing that "in recent years, the idea of directly contributing to a youngster's chances of success has found great appeal among educators, business leaders and others."[6] And The Baltimore Sun pronounced: "Mentoring--in which someone who has made it helps along someone who hasn't--suddenly has become hot among educators and others trying to solve high drop-out rates among inner-city youth."[7]

By the end of 1990, mentoring had arrived, replete not only with a wide range of supporters and a full-fledged field of activity, but with a euphoric set of expectations as well. However, this was far from the first appearance of similar ideas on the American stage. As already suggested, mentoring's principal elements--middle-class volunteers, a focus on the poor, and reliance on personal relationships--constitute a recurring reform impulse, one that aroused similar fervor in the past. These earlier episodes help illuminate the dynamics of the current movement.

FRIENDLY VISITING

While Big Brothers/Big Sisters is the most familiar antecedent of the current mentoring wave, a still earlier manifestation of this particular reform impulse can be found in the closing decades of the 19th century, in a now obscure set of campaigns known as "friendly visiting."[8]

As America entered the final quarter of the 19th century, social relations were badly strained. The great railroad strike of 1878 was the most violent and wide ranging labor conflict in the country's history. Hordes of unemployed men roamed the country in search of employment. Squalid urban slums were swelling with

immigrants, in whose homes one commentator saw "an immorality as deep as [their] poverty... a moral atmosphere as pestilential as the physical."[9] The country was increasingly split between the classes of capital and labor. To many, it seemed to be ripping apart at the seams.

In response to what one reformer called a terrible chasm between the rich and poor, "a chasm which is becoming wider and wider as the years roll by," urban civic leaders launched a new movement of moral and social reform based on the principles of "scientific charity."[10]

In cities around the country, charitable societies sprang up, armed with volunteer "Friendly Visitors" who were supported by a few paid agents. The male paid agents managed the operation, but the female Friendly Visitors were the main vessels for carrying out the program.

The Friendly Visiting campaigns were unveiled with extreme optimism and an evangelical fervor. In 1885, one leader, Charles Kellogg, wrote of a battalion of 100,000 visitors sweeping "like a tidal wave" over urban America and "flooding every part... [with] sweetness and order and light." [11]

The immediate objective was moral uplift, "to raise the character and elevate the moral nature of the poor." The immediate enemy was relief, almsgiving that engendered "habits of dependence, destroying manliness and self-respect" while making "pauperism a permanent institution, a positive profession." Almsgiving left the poor person's "heart untouched."[12]

The broader goal was a return to an earlier, organic society in which class tensions were mitigated by bonds of sympathy. According to historian Roy Lubove, whose volume The Professional Altruist offers the fullest treatment of the movement, Friendly Visiting sought to "substitute for the spontaneous neighborliness of the small town."[13]

In particular, the Friendly Visitor--like the "mentor" and the "big brother" to follow--was to be a role model for children of the poor. As Mary Richmond explains in her book, Friendly Visiting Among the Poor, "We should not despair of the children, so long as we can attach them to us, and give them a new and better outlook upon life."[14]

The vehicle for achieving these goals was an instrumental form of personal relationship, one designed to produce practical results. The Visitors were expected "to think of the poor as husbands, wives, sons, and daughters," and to exhibit "all possible sympathy, tact, patience, cheer, and wise advice."[15] As Lubove points out, the tools of the Friendly Visitor were actually a mix of personality and class affiliation: the visitor was "dispatched

not as an expert in investigation or the handling of relief, but as the representative of a middle class."[16]

Despite such hopeful beginnings, Friendly Visiting collapsed by the turn of the century. The movement was beset by a profound shortage of volunteers, of citizens who had enough time to devote to this enterprise. Despite calls for 100,000 Visitors, the actual numbers were far smaller and trailed off quickly. Increasingly, the functions of the Visitors were taken over by the paid agents.

In addition, Friendly Visitors found it difficult to help the poor. The genteel and sometimes patronizing outsiders discovered a population more inclined to turn to their friends and neighbors for solace than to the representatives of middle-class life. While a few Visitors managed to establish strong personal relationships and be of some help, they were the exception.

Finally, Friendly Visiting was overwhelmed by economic realities. A series of depressions in the late 19th century underscored the material basis of poverty and put the power of middle-class friendship in perspective.

Badly battered, Friendly Visiting came to occupy another chapter in what historian Paul Boyer describes as a familiar cycle in urban social reform, one proceeding rapidly from "initial enthusiasm to baffled discouragement."[17] By the first years of the 20th century, even the major elements of Friendly Visiting, middle-class participation in the fight against poverty and an approach based on relationship, had given way to the newly emergent social work profession.

First, the early social workers replaced the approach of personal relationship with technical expertise in the form of casework. Next, middle-class volunteers were relegated to ceremonial and ancillary functions in the new social agency bureaucracies, where the real work of dealing with the poor was consolidated in the hands of paid professionals. According to Lubove, what remained was "neither alms nor a friend, but a professional service."[18]

BIG BROTHERS/BIG SISTERS

Although Lubove's phrase accurately characterizes human service delivery following the demise of Friendly Visiting--and arguably remains true today--the beginning of the new century saw another movement based on middle-class voluntarism and instrumental relationships quietly take form in the shadow of the new bureaucracies.[19]

This new movement was founded by Ernest K. Coulter, a New York newspaperman who left journalism to work in the first Children's Court in the city. Coulter was appalled at the misery and ne-

glect he witnessed among the youngsters brought before the Court, and was concerned that the "justice" the court delivered took little account of their needs and personal problems. He felt this lack was responsible for the high rate of recidivism.

In an address to the Men's Club of the Central Presbyterian Church of New York on December 3, 1904, Coulter shared his perspective with the audience of middle-class businessmen, professionals and civic leaders. He illustrated his theory with the story of a young boy recently charged with a crime that would likely send him, upon conviction, to a reformatory. Coulter believed the harsh reformatory held little hope for rehabilitation:

> There is only one possible way to save that youngster, and that is to have some earnest, true man volunteer to be his big brother, to look after him, help him to do right, make the little chap feel that there is at least one human being in this great city who takes a personal interest in him; who cares whether he lives or dies.

In closing, Coulter issued an appeal: "I call for a volunteer." The 39 volunteers who signed up that night became the first Big Brothers.

Their experience was far from easy. Trying to make a home visit, one pioneer Big Brother was greeted by the little brother's mother, wielding a large pistol. Another was menaced with a pan of sudsy dishwater. Coulter himself spent eight years trying to rescue a member of the notorious Fagins street gang. Despite exhaustive efforts, including assistance from other "Bigs" who provided homes, jobs and support, the boy refused all reformation, eventually disappearing for good.

Despite these initial frustrations, the Big Brothers/Big Sisters movement caught on, soon generating its own fervent supporters. The early euphoria was epitomized by a rally for the new movement held at the Casino Theatre in New York in April 1916. The Casino rally--attended by 2,000 men and women, black and white, from all denominations--reflected the strong religious cast of Big Brothers/Big Sisters in its beginning years.

The audience was addressed by a series of clergymen who whipped the crowd, according to one historian of the movement, into a "revival-like fervor." The first speaker, a Catholic priest, declared that each adult "must come forward and, man for man and woman for woman, get into this work for the children." The next guest, Rabbi J. L. Magnes, compared wayward youth to "tender plants," declaring: "In this day of cold efficiency--efficiency in business, efficiency in charity--it is a miserable small justice our great organized charities do....The personal touch is absent. It can't be put into a scientific system....It is human."

The final orator, Episcopal Bishop David H. Greer, likened New York to a great storage battery of kindness: "Thousands are ready to do good if they have the opportunity, and this great, happy, growing movement gives them the opportunity." Greer echoed Magnes' concern about the impersonality of existing social bureaucracies, warning: "Not by social machinery are bad boys to be made good boys, but by the warm, personal touch in life."

Alongside concerns about impersonal, arid social welfare bureaucracies and their inability to reach delinquent youth, deeper fears of impending social breakdown propelled the new movement. Big Brothers/Big Sisters grew up as a middle-class movement, part of the broader push of Progressivism. Its founders were distressed by the same extremes of wealth and poverty in the United States that had propelled the founders of Friendly Visiting. They saw children and youth growing up in poverty as potential sources of social breakdown, in need of socialization, firm guidance and human connection with mainstream adults.

However, unlike Friendly Visiting, which was replaced by professional services in the wake of its inability to live up to unrealistic claims, Big Brothers/Big Sisters managed during the period between the world wars to evolve a balance between fervor and operational consistency, by a gradual process of professionalizing. In 1921, the first Big Brother/Big Sister Federation was formed, setting standards for programs and one-to-one relationships that aspired to the Federation's <u>imprimateur</u>. At first these standards were quite flexible, aiming to cultivate wide acceptance; over time they became firmer and more clearly specified. Eventually the Federation evolved into Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America, the body that continues to govern this movement today.

The implications of Big Brothers/Big Sisters' and Friendly Visiting's contrasting histories will be taken up again in later sections, which analyze the experience of the contemporary mentoring movement.

III. FROM MYTHOLOGY TO POLICY

Just as the earlier interest in voluntarism and relationships was channeled through particular roles--that of the "visitor" or the "big brother" and "big sister"--the current fervor too has its own vessel, that of the "mentor." The mentor is distinguished from the earlier forms in its status as one of the most enduring and celebrated relationships in our culture. Indeed, mentoring brings with it an entire mythology.

The word "mentor" derives from a Greek tale and, etymologically, from a number of Greek roots meaning "think," "counsel," "remember" and "endure." One contemporary article describes a mentor as a "protector, benefactor, sponsor, champion, advocate, supporter or counselor." Another writer refers to patrons, guides and peer pals, while a third adds host, teacher and exemplar. The phrase "role model" is frequently invoked.[1]

While these descriptors underscore the complexity of the notion, they only go part of the way toward capturing its essential features. Professor Uri Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University developed a more useful definition following consultation with Japanese scholars about similar relationships in their culture.

According to Bronfenbrenner, mentoring is a one-to-one relationship between a pair of unrelated individuals, usually of different ages, and is developmental in nature: "A mentor is an older, more experienced person who seeks to further the development of character and competence in a younger person...." Guidance may take many forms, including demonstration, instruction, challenge and encouragement "on a more or less regular basis over an extended period of time." Furthermore, this relationship is distinguished by "a special bond of mutual commitment" and "an emotional character of respect, loyalty, and identification."[2]

THE CLASSICAL CONCEPTION OF MENTORING

Bronfenbrenner's definition distills what might be called the classical conception of mentoring: a robust and highly idealized relationship that has attained mythic proportions in our culture. Stories from several different eras capture its spirit.

Homer's "Mentor"

The word "mentor" first appears as a character's name in Homer's Odyssey some 700 years before the birth of Christ.[3] According to the Odyssey, "Mentor was an old friend of Odysseus, to whom the king had entrusted his whole household when he sailed." In particular, the king entrusted to this "wise and faithful friend" the safekeeping and development of his only son, Telemachus.

Mentor attends to this task. But it is only when the goddess Athena--the goddess associated with fortunate adventures--takes on the guise of Mentor, that the elevated qualities of the role are revealed. Mentor/Athena tells the young warrior, who is about to embark on the search for his father: "Today has proved you, Telemachus, neither a coward nor a fool....No fear, then, that this journey of yours will end in farce or failure....you have every reason to feel that you will make a success of this undertaking."

Not content to impart wisdom and encouragement, Mentor/Athena prepares the way for the boy's important voyage: "You will soon be off on this journey you have set your heart on. For am I not your father's friend, and ready to find you a fast ship and sail with you myself?" After making the promised provisions, the mentor/goddess beckons Telemachus to begin the journey by taking the seat beside him.

Grimms' "Iron John"

From the 1820s, the Grimm Brothers' story of "Iron John," recently revived by the poet Robert Bly, offers another version of the mentoring myth.[4] Iron John is a wild man, covered with rust-colored hair. After being captured by the king's hunters, Iron John is caged and displayed in the castle courtyard.

The king's young son allows his golden ball to roll into the wild man's cage, and the prisoner offers to return it if the boy will set him free. The youngster retrieves the key, unlocks the gate, and earns Iron John's gratitude. Promising to teach the essentials of life to the boy, Iron John carries the boy off on his shoulders.

At this juncture, Iron John the wild man becomes Iron John the mentor. Assuming the mantle of initiator is a step that Bly compares to the moment in ancient Greek life when a priest of Dionysus accepted a young man as a student, or "the moment in Eskimo life today when the shaman, sometimes covered entirely with the fur of wild animals...appears in the village and takes a boy away for spirit instruction."

After imparting the promised life lessons, Iron John compels the boy to leave the forest. Discerning "no evil" in his protege's heart, he determines to give the boy a gift: "Whenever you are in trouble, come to the edge of the forest and shout, 'Iron John!' I'll come to the edge of the forest and help you. My power is great, greater than you believe, and I have gold and silver in abundance."

Over time, the boy returns on several occasions for Iron John's help. With his mentor's guidance, the boy earns great acclaim as a knight and marries a princess in a neighboring kingdom. At the

wedding, the boy is reunited with his parents, as well as with a surprise guest, Iron John. Released from a spell by the boy's achievements, Iron John himself has been transformed back into a king.

Raines' "A Mentor's Presence"

A third story, this one from our own time, reveals the continuing vitality of the classical conception of mentoring. In an op/ed piece in The New York Times Magazine, Washington bureau chief Howell Raines reflects on the influence of his college English professor, Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams.[5] His story, "A Mentor's Presence," reflects many of the same themes we find in earlier tales.

Raines sought and eventually won his professor's affection "to the extent that I came to see myself as something like an honorary son." This relationship was not always easy. McWilliams wanted to harden his students "for the solitary toil of a literary apprenticeship," and he was fond of telling them that "most, if not all, would fail."

Indeed, McWilliams predicted that the students who did succeed would not necessarily be the most gifted stylists, but rather those who refused to quit. Then, Raines recalls, the older man would strike "a line across his desk with a thick shiny fingernail," proclaiming, "You must always plow on to the end of the row."

Raines adds that the row "stretched for 12 years" between the initial draft and publication of his first novel, which he dedicated to McWilliams. He concludes that the professor "influenced me more than any man I have known other than my own father." According to Raines, that influence included his choice of careers, standards of professional performance and his sense of personal honor: "In short, he was my mentor, and since his death in February, I have been reflecting on the union of spirit that exists between a mentor and protege."

Raines defines it thus:

> A young man cannot will a relationship with a mentor. It must emerge from the flow of two lives, and it must have the reciprocity of a good romance. The adulation of the younger man must be received with a sheltering affection that, in time, ripens into mature respect between equals. Carried to full term, it is a bond less profound but more complex and subtle than that between father and son, a kinship cemented by choice rather than biology.

For Raines, "There will be no one else like Richebourg McWilliams in my life, nor would I want there to be."

The Common Elements

As Raines' words attest, the myth of mentoring is enormously sympathetic, and the mentors portrayed in the three stories are heroic figures. All three are endowed with great wisdom. There is even the suggestion of the supernatural in two of these tales--Mentor is a goddess in disguise; Iron John's powers are great, "greater than you believe." The magic of mentors, like their wisdom, is applied particularly to aid the proteges' "journey."

As they glorify mentors and the mentoring relationship, these tales reveal a trio of elements at the very heart of the classical conception of mentoring: achievement, nurturance and generativity.

Achievement. Mentors foster their proteges' achievement. Homer's Mentor prepares the way for Telemachus' journey, providing the necessary equipment, encouraging him, even volunteering to accompany him on his search. Iron John promises to provide his young prince with help along the way in his life's journey. Professor McWilliams teaches Howell Raines how to be competent at his chosen vocation; he warns him about being excessively "mawkish," instructs him to work hard, and remains a sympathetic critic long after Raines graduates from college.

With their mentors' help, all three proteges succeed in their journeys, which in each case prove to be trying ones: Telemachus finds his father, the young prince becomes a successful knight, and Raines develops into a published novelist and established writer. Befitting the genre, all the stories progress to happy endings.

Nurturance. Equally important, the mentors contribute to another journey, the transition of their proteges to adulthood. As psychologist Daniel Levinson points out, the mentor functions as a "transitional figure who invites and welcomes a young man into the adult world."[6]

Part of this transition is accomplished through the provision of "life lessons," as Iron John promises the young prince. They are lessons in character. To wit, Raines attributes not only his choice of career and professional standards to McWilliams, but his sense of "personal honor."

These lessons take place within the context of a nurturing relationship. Robert Bly describes mentors as "male mothers" interested in "nurturing souls."[7] Howell Raines describes a relation-

ship characterized by "sheltering affection," one with the "reciprocity of a good romance."

Generativity. Finally, mentoring relationships are intergenerational, characterized by the voluntary assumption of responsibility for members of the next generation. They are an expression of what Erik Erikson calls generativity, the impulse to pass on values, culture and lifeblood to the next generation. In Erikson's view, generativity constitutes the hallmark of successful midlife development, and the mentors in these tales all demonstrate this impulse.[8] In the process, they gain themselves: at one end, Iron John is freed from his hex; on the other, McWilliams reaps the satisfaction of having shaped a good writer and contributing to the ongoing vitality of letters.

Traditional mentoring stories, based on the classical conception, concern themselves almost exclusively with men and boys. In fact, it is difficult to locate mentoring stories involving women and girls. To this day, the classical conception of mentoring continues to enjoy broad currency in the sphere of male adult development, as evidenced by such works as Levinson's Seasons of a Man's Life and Bly's Iron John.

Over the past decade, however, mentoring has started to become more closely associated with women in at least one sphere: career development, particularly in the corporate world.

MOVING UP: MENTORING GOES CORPORATE

While the classical conception of mentoring continues to be prominent, a second incarnation gained force in the 1970s. This variation of the original concept emphasizes mentoring's instrumental aspects, those fostering achievement, over its more nurturing and generative dimensions. One early 1980s reviewer, Sharon Merriam, commented on the fervor this form of mentoring had engendered:

> The subject of talk shows, business seminars, journal and magazine articles, the interest in mentoring has reached..."mania" proportions. The listener or reader is told that mentoring is the key to career and academic success.

She concludes: "Women in particular are being advised to find one and be one to another woman."

As the previous section suggests, achievement and mentoring have long been associated. Indeed, as Merriam states, "History is replete with examples of such relationships: Socrates and Plato, Freud and Jung, Lorenze de Medici and Michelangelo, Haydn and Beethoven, Boas and Mead, Sartre and de Beauvoir, and so on."[9]

Retrospective research studies, too, have often focused on such a connection, ranging from a 1926 study, "The Early Mental Traits of Three Hundred Geniuses," which portrays mentoring as important in the lives of many of its subjects, to a more recent review of Nobel Laureates in the sciences, which finds a similar tie.[10]

However, nowhere has this reduction of the broader notion of mentoring to a highly instrumental one been more thorough than in the corporate world. One reviewer comments that in opposition "to the classical notion of a young person being guided in all aspects of life by an older, wiser person... the business world sees it as a one-dimensional phenomenon in which the protege's career is guided by a senior organization person."[11]

In fact, researchers and observers have recently focused on the critical role of mentoring as a cornerstone of the "old boy network." A 1978 Harvard Business Review article described and glorified the role in profiling three male executives. Its title's message, "Everyone Who Makes It Has a Mentor,"[12] has been echoed in scores of other stories in the business press.

It is no accident that these articles began appearing at the time when more and more women were entering management ranks, confronting the "glass ceiling," and discovering the power of the old boy network. Many of these women were casting about for ways to ascend the ladder of mobility; for some, the search led to mentoring.

However, women's search for mentors has often proved difficult. In Men and Women of the Corporation, Rosabeth Kanter concluded that "the number of mentoring relationships available to women does not appear to be keeping pace with the increasing number of women needing mentors."

Kanter found that most mentors in the corporations she studied were male: most managers were male and preferred to mentor aspirants like themselves. Arguing that mentors make a difference in the prospects of their proteges--by going to battle for them, providing help in circumventing bureaucratic roadblocks, and casting reflected power--Kanter advocated "artificial sponsorship programs" for women and minorities who inevitably found upward mobility blocked. In a later study of another corporation, Kanter argued that women who didn't make it failed due to the absence of mentors, among other supports.[13]

Many subsequent volumes echoed Kanter's perspective. In The Corporate Connection: Why Executive Women Need Mentors to Reach the Top, Agnes Missirian reported the results of a survey of 100 top businesswomen, and argued that mentoring was an important element in their achievement.[14] In The Managerial Woman, Hennig and Jardim studied 25 women executives and found that every one had a mentor. This discovery led them to advocate that women in

corporations "look for a coach, a godfather or a godmother, a mentor, an advocate, someone in a more senior position who can teach...support...advise...critique."[15]

Not surprisingly, women's quest for mentors moved quickly from research to action, spawning an entire industry of how-to books and seminars. A good example is the 1982 book, Mentors and Proteges: How to Establish, Strengthen and Get the Most from a Mentor/Protege Relationship.[16] Corporate seminar companies like Career Track began offering sessions specifically designed to teach these skills.

In its translation from a classical notion to the corporate world, mentoring became increasingly defined not only as instrumental, a strategy for success, but as intentional, something that could be engineered. With the seminars, "how-to" manuals, and other self-help tools came a wave of mentoring programs for women and minorities, both traditionally cut off from paths to success in large commercial institutions. Along the way, these programs spread to other areas of endeavor, most notably education.

IV. THE NEW WAVE OF MENTORING

In the summer of 1990, an observer quoted in The New York Times characterized the rapid multiplication in mentoring programs for young people growing up in poverty: "There were twice as many programs last year and twice as many programs the year before and the year before. It's been a phenomenon mostly of the late '80s."[1] A decade after mentoring had gone corporate, it was going public, portrayed increasingly as a tool for helping young people overcome poverty and make it into mainstream society.

If the classical conception of mentoring can be seen as the first wave of the notion and the corporate incarnation as the second, then the late 1980s began witnessing what amounts to the third. Like its immediate predecessor, this new wave is characterized by instrumental and intentional tendencies, and by the use of volunteers drawn from the professional class. The significant difference is the group targeted: disadvantaged children and youth.

This section will chart the mentoring landscape that has appeared in recent years, beginning with its relationship to a movement whose origins have already been discussed, Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America. We will then look at a range of current mentoring programs and at organizations founded to support their activities.

BIG BROTHERS/BIG SISTERS

An independent movement, Big Brothers/Big Sisters is also part of the mentoring field, to the extent that mentoring is very broadly about one-to-one matches between adult volunteers and youth. However, its distinct identity remains intact, both at the movement and program levels.

As a movement, Big Brothers/Big Sisters has been around for 85 years, evolving through professionalization, a merger and substantial growth. At present, Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America (BB/BSA) consists of 483 local affiliates in 49 states, matching 60,000 youth with adult "Bigs." In addition, the movement counts 40,000 youth on a waiting list largely composed of minority boys and girls. BB/BSA is at present a large, stable and mature movement, so established that it even copyrighted the phrase "One-to-One." In 1990, the first major evaluation of the program was initiated by Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) with support from Lilly Endowment, the Commonwealth Fund and The Pew Charitable Trusts.

The organization is centralized through a national office in Philadelphia that is responsible for monitoring the establishment of new programs, assuring compliance with standards by local affiliates, overseeing development of special projects, conduct-

ing an annual convention, and performing public relations, fund raising, lobbying and other support functions. Local affiliates pay dues to the national office, based on a percentage of their annual budgets.

BB/BSA's national standards help assure that affiliated programs share a set of common features, particularly around the matching and supervision process, which is highly structured. When a volunteer comes forward to serve as a Big Brother or Big Sister, the individual is carefully screened through an application, a face to face interview, a home visit, psychological tests, a police check and an examination of references. It is not unusual for the application process to take months; in some places, the candidate pays a processing fee.

Once a match is made, a team is formed including the "Big," the "Little," the Little's parent(s), and an agency caseworker. The team meets for the first time in the youth's home, a session that frequently ends with all four going out for a meal together. The team continues to meet periodically over the course of the match.

Volunteers are asked to make an extensive time commitment to the one-to-one relationship, agreeing "to spend three to five hours a week with the Little Brother or Little Sister, providing the caseworker with periodic updates of the progress of the match."[2] Matches are expected to last at least a year, and most agencies report an average length of two years.

BB/BSA affiliates employ professional case workers to supervise one-to-one matches. Each professional is assigned a caseload of 60 matches, though in some cases, affiliates can petition the national organization for a variation in this ratio. The supervision is usually conducted by phone, with more in-depth assessments occurring approximately every six months.

Several additional items are worth noting in the context of mentoring. Big Brothers/Big Sisters prefers to initiate matches before the age of 10 and usually accepts youth only through their early teens. In addition, these efforts are usually father-substitute programs, and an absent parent is generally prerequisite for a youth's participation.

It is important to note that the mentoring movement has grown up partly in response to perceived limitations of Big Brothers/Big Sisters: its inability to serve larger numbers of disadvantaged youth and a recruitment process that some observers believe is too rigid, thereby discouraging many potential adult volunteers.

MENTORING PROGRAMS

Mentoring programs range in size from ambitious national initiatives to local efforts with diverse sponsors, few of which have

numbers approaching those of local BB/BSA affiliates. Individual programs typically maintain from a handful to several hundred matches each year.

National Programs

Several national organizations have mounted demonstration projects in multiple sites around the country, usually accompanied by evaluation research to explore mentoring's potential and limitations.

Career Beginnings, the first and largest of the demonstration projects, was initiated by the Commonwealth Fund in 1985. The program targets "tenacious youth": high school juniors and seniors who come from low-income families, have average attendance and grades, and have "demonstrated their motivation and commitment beyond school activities," but who are not certain to make it on to college or good jobs.[3]

Career Beginnings enrolls students in their junior year and continues through their first year after high school graduation. Sponsored by a local college or university, it also operates in the students' high schools and involves the business community, where mentors are recruited for each student.

By 1990, the project had worked with 7,000 students and 7,000 mentors--2,000 in 1990 alone. Its support comes from several foundations in addition to Commonwealth, including the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Career Beginnings is operated by the Center for Human Resources at Brandeis University and is the subject of two research projects funded by Commonwealth.

Campus Partners in Learning (CPIL) is administered by the Campus Compact, an offshoot of the Education Commission of the States (ECS). CPIL is designed to create opportunities for college students to serve as mentors for at-risk youth in grades four through nine. It aims simultaneously to develop a service ethic among college students and to help middle-school students academically.

Funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Honeywell Foundation, CPIL began with 10 schools during the 1989-1990 academic year and increased that number by two schools in the following academic year, with a goal of 20 matches per site. Among the participating schools are Boston University, Connecticut College, Michigan State, Xavier University (Louisiana) and the University of California at Santa Cruz. The chair of the project is former Minnesota Governor Rudy Perpich, also the chair of ECS. P/PV's research on CPIL is funded by Carnegie, MacArthur and The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Linking Lifetimes draws on mentors at the other end of the age spectrum, attempting to match older adults with at-risk youth, potential dropouts, juvenile offenders and teen mothers in 11 sites around the country, pursuing a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 30 matches per site. In most of the programs, mentors are paid a stipend. In two instances, Linking Lifetimes sites are operating in conjunction with the local Foster Grandparent Program. The project is operated by Temple University's Center for Intergenerational Learning and funded by a coalition of private foundations, including the Charles Stewart Mott, Burden, Ittleson and Edna McConnell Clark Foundations. P/PV is assessing four of the programs, with funding from Carnegie, Pew and The Pinkerton Foundation.

Each One, Reach One is operated by the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI), with funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. NBCDI relies on volunteers recruited through local chapters to serve 260 children in Detroit, Michigan and 380 in Greensboro, North Carolina. The project aims to advance the organization's belief that "each child has a right to a role model."[4]

Founded in 1970, NBCDI is an open-membership organization of 3,000, with chapters in 33 cities. In addition to running programs like Each One, Reach One, NBCDI lobbies on behalf of black children.

Local Mentoring Programs

Alongside high-profile national programs like Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Career Beginnings, a fleet of much more numerous local programs is moving forward with small efforts sponsored by the black and corporate communities, as well as larger programs initiated by individual entrepreneurs.

Projects of the Black Community

A rich source of local activity, the black community has given rise to mentoring programs that generally attempt to link successful black men and women, many of whom have moved out of the inner city, with young people growing up in impoverished urban neighborhoods. Programs have tended to be small, diverse, and plentiful. The following are just a few examples.

The **WDCU program** in Washington, D.C., was started by Ernest White, the radio station's public affairs director. This initiative pairs 32 black men, mostly professionals living in the suburbs, with 40 youngsters, ages 8 through 13, who attend the Malcolm X Elementary School in Southeast Washington. The school's administration chooses the students for the program, focusing on youth who are struggling academically, having attendance problems, or getting into a lot of fights. The mentors

begin working with youth during the summer prior to the fourth grade; mostly, they get together with the boys on Saturdays for tutoring and one-to-one conversations.

Also in Washington, D.C., the **Black Male Youth Health Enhancement Program** operates out of the 6,000-member Shiloh Baptist Church, which recruits mentors from not only the church, but the larger community. The program brings together mentors and 9- to 13-year-old boys living in inner-city Washington. Mentoring takes place informally on Wednesday nights at the church as part of a much larger mix of parental involvement, peer interaction and staff support. Participants also take part in workshops on pregnancy prevention, substance abuse, and life skills issues.

A third example, the **Education Initiative Program** in Providence, Rhode Island, targets borderline students from five Providence schools and provides them with mentors from the black community. Sponsored by the Urban League, the program asks mentors to spend a year with students, serving as a role model and helping them "to recognize the importance of education, broaden their life experiences, and develop goals." The program takes both boys and girls. In addition to mentoring, the Urban League supplies an after-school tutorial program that engages local college students as tutors, a training program for mentors, and some staff support. A total of 100 students have received mentors over three years.[5]

The black community has given rise to a myriad of other innovative programs. In Oakland, California, for example, the Frick Mentoring Program matches black women professionals and black girls. In Philadelphia, the Omega Psi Phi fraternity, one of the oldest and largest black organizations in America, is providing 30 mentors as part of a scholarship program sponsored by Ruth Hayre, a retired Philadelphia school administrator. In Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, and many other cities, local chapters of One Hundred Black Men are matching black men and young black males in one-to-one relationships. And in Seattle, professional baseball player Harold Reynolds has started a group called Role Models Unlimited, matching black businessmen with inner-city youth.

Corporate Projects

The corporate world has been another important source of local mentoring programs. Amidst the upsurge of business interest in education over the past decade, many corporations have gone from adopting schools to encouraging their employees to "adopt" individual students.

In Cincinnati, Proctor and Gamble's work with Woodward High School has resulted in **Project ASPIRE**, a program that matches 100 students from Woodward, a school with 85 percent minority enrollment, one-to-one with Proctor and Gamble employees. The

project's mission is to develop in youth the "attitudes necessary to succeed in an academic program and to provide routes to personal development and success."[6] ASPIRE asks mentors to stay with students for five years, from ninth grade through the year following high school.

Fannie Mae in Washington, D.C., began a program with Woodson High School, open to any student who earns all As and Bs in a particular semester. By 1990, 135 students were participating. Fannie Mae provides each student with a mentor from the corporation and $500 in scholarship money for each honor roll semester. The mentors focus on career counseling, bring the students to the workplace, and are expected to function as "role models." Woodson is located in one of the most economically disadvantaged neighborhoods in Washington.

In Austin, Texas, IBM has initiated **Project Mentor** with the "simple premise [that] giving young people consistent, one-to-one support and attention--that is, serving as a friend and role model--boosts self-esteem, increases work quality, and, most of all, improves school attendance." Since 1987, the program has made 900 matches for students in the Austin public schools identified by counselors as potential dropouts. The mentors come not only from IBM, but many other local corporations. Many students and mentors in this effort are Hispanic, and the program endeavors to create matches where both partners speak Spanish.[7]

Alongside mentoring programs sponsored by individual corporations are a set of initiatives that involve business consortia. Some, such as Milwaukee's **One on One** effort, are the creations of corporate umbrella organizations. Launched by the Greater Milwaukee Committee and the Greater Milwaukee Association of Commerce, One on One grew out of business concern over a dropout rate of 50 percent in the local public schools and widening class differences in the Midwestern city.

One on One targets minority youth from low-income neighborhoods--students who are deemed by teachers in 11 participating middle schools as "at risk." Approximately 200 students are matched with mentors from Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Wisconsin Electric and Power Company, civic organizations like the Rotary club and the Kiwanis, and city government. Employees are given release time to serve as mentors and are asked to contact students weekly for at least a year. Activities include tutoring students, taking them to special events, exposing them to the workplace, and talking to them about "interests, concerns, problems, goals, expectations."[8]

Projects of Social Entrepreneurs

Another set of programs, constituting an important part of the local mentoring landscape, is the product of a set of social

entrepreneurs, individuals who have created new organizations to deliver mentoring. They draw on mentors from the black, corporate, and other communities, but their driving force is a single person. Three in particular are worthy of mention.

Mentors, Inc., in Washington, D.C., was created by Shayne Schneider, a former teacher and current parent of several D.C. public school students. Schneider decided to start a new program for the Washington schools after watching a television program on mentoring. She launched Mentors, Inc. in 1987, and within a year had forged an alliance with the Board of Trade, the chamber of commerce for large corporations in the area. By 1991, Mentors, Inc. was matching 500 public school students with mentors.

The program is concentrated in seven D.C. high schools and focuses on low-income students, particularly those who have demonstrated the potential to complete high school and go on to further education. Most receive grades of B or C. Mentors are asked to commit four hours a month and begin to meet with students during their sophomore year. Mentors, Inc. deputizes school counselors to oversee the matches in their building at no additional pay.

Philadelphia Futures was started by Marcienne Mattleman, a former teacher, education professor and head of that city's Mayor's Commission on Literacy. The program aspires to engage Philadelphians, particularly graduates of the city's public high schools, in the concerns of disadvantaged current students. The effort targets the same B and C students as Mentors, Inc., but works with youngsters from elementary through high school. The program draws mentors from businesses, civic groups, and the general community, and made approximately 200 matches in 1990, its first year in full operation. Like Mentors, Inc., Philadelphia Futures operates with a small central staff and relies on counselors and teachers to supervise matches in individual schools.

Project RAISE in Baltimore is the creation of Abell Foundation President Robert Embry. This program began in 1988 with a group of seven sponsoring organizations, including two churches, two banks, two colleges, and a black fraternal organization. Each organization adopted a class of sixth-graders, promising them mentors through high school graduation.

RAISE's mentors commit to at least one year of weekly contacts with youth, including face-to-face meetings twice a month. RAISE's field staff, called project coordinators, set up shop right in the schools and function as "mentors to the mentors," making home visits, providing academic support, and advocating on behalf of their charges.

The project's specific goal is to reduce the dropout rate among participating students by 50 percent. In fact, concern that the

sixth grade may be too late to intervene has led the project to begin a new initiative, RAISE II, which adopts students in the second grade and offers them mentors through the start of high school. Together, the two RAISE programs have about 450 active matches.

Other Local Programs

The programs described here represent central clusters of mentoring programs, but by no means describe the boundaries of mentoring activity. A recent survey of college campuses found 1,700 mentoring and tutoring programs, over half of which have started since 1980. In addition, many social programs have added a mentoring component as the notion has gained in popularity. And while many programs focus on school children, others are targeting youth outside the schools, particularly teenage mothers, young offenders and 18-year-olds leaving the foster care system.

Support Organizations

In addition to mentoring programs, organizations and activities designed to stimulate and publicize mentoring activity have emerged at the national, state and local levels. While these support services do not deliver mentoring services themselves, they have a prominent place in the mentoring landscape.

National Efforts

In 1989, philanthropist Ray Chambers created **One to One** in "direct response to President Bush's call for increased volunteerism." Chambers heads not only One to One, but the Points of Light Foundation as well.[9]

The original mission of One to One was "to connect every at-risk person with a mentor and, through that mentor, to a caring society." Within this mission, One to One hopes "to recruit one million new mentors over a 12-month period" and to "stimulate a national mentoring movement." Over time, the group's goals have broadened to include increasing the number of people who volunteer to mentor, strengthening existing mentoring programs, stimulating development of new programs, and making "mentoring a high priority in every American community."

The purpose of these activities is to counteract the widening "divisions within our nation," and the "disconnection of low-income minority youth." To combat these maladies, One to One has two main strategies. The first, the National One to One Mentoring Partnership, is working to assemble leadership groups in some 20 sectors, including business, labor, education, and philanthropy, and getting these groups to rally around the cause of mentoring. The second strategy, a set of Local Leadership

Councils, is designed to stimulate mentoring in local communities, including Philadelphia, Boston, Atlanta, Charlotte, Los Angeles and New York. One to One has also formed partnerships with both the United Way of America--an alliance called "A Success Strategy for Youth"--and the investment bank Goldman Sachs, which has loaned an employee to serve as president of One to One.

Another national initiative is **One PLUS One**, a joint venture of the Public Broadcasting System, through its National Media Outreach Center in Pittsburgh, and Capital Cities/ABC. One PLUS One is an outgrowth of ongoing collaboration between these two groups around the subject of literacy.

Since its inception, One PLUS One has organized the first National Mentoring Conference, produced and aired a nationally televised documentary on mentoring, and issued voluminous print and video materials on the potential and practice of mentoring. In addition, One PLUS One has been creating a National Mentor Network, with support from the U.S. Department of Labor. The effort promotes local collaboration among mentoring organizations, helps with technical assistance, and produces a directory of national and local programs.

State Efforts

The most prominent state initiative focused on mentoring is **Rhode Island's Children's Crusade.** This extraordinarily ambitious drive aims to help kids stay in school, specifically to "reduce the dropout rate to an unacceptable-but-improved 25 percent from a horrendous 50 percent" for disadvantaged minority children.[10]

Rhode Island plans to begin with 3,000 low-income third-graders in the state and to get as many eight-year-olds and their parents as possible to sign contracts. If the children agree to stay off drugs, remain in school and send the Crusade their report cards each term, every one of them will be provided with mentors for 10 years. On graduating from high school, they will be awarded a scholarship to college.

The Crusade plans to recruit "Rhode Island's senior citizens, adult professionals, and college and high school age students" as mentors, as well as seeking mentors from a variety of voluntary and ethnic organizations. Mentors can serve in one of three ways: by calling a student six to eight times a year; through group mentoring, in which six mentors meet together monthly with 12 to 18 students; or through one-to-one matches with twice-monthly meetings.

To date, most of the activity of the Children's Crusade has involved planning and supporting mentoring that is carried out locally. The project, run out of the Commissioner of Higher

Education's office, is starting a Mentorship Academy at a local college that will train parents, guardians and volunteer mentors.

Other states have also been active in the support of mentoring. **New York** has a mentoring committee under the direction of Mathilda Cuomo. **New Mexico**'s Scholars Program is getting businesses and support agencies like Big Brothers and Big Sisters involved in a mentoring program to help coax students along so they can qualify for academic scholarships.[11] **Kansas** funded a Youth Education Service program in which college students serve as mentors for children at risk of dropping out of school.[12] **Minnesota** has a governor's committee to stimulate mentoring, and **California** is setting up, at its governor's instigation, a department dedicated to encourage mentoring.

Local Activities

Several local initiatives stand out. In Oakland, California, the Urban Strategies Council has created the **Oakland Mentoring Center**, focused on providing "a cost-effective way for resource-short programs to get access to expertise on mentoring theory and practice." The Center, funded by city government and local foundations, will work specifically to help new programs get started, provide regular training sessions for program staff and mentors, conduct in-service seminars for programs, explore new resource development for mentoring programs and provide a collection of clearinghouse functions.[13]

On the other side of the country, the **Baltimore Mentoring Institute** includes a mentoring clearinghouse, serves a local network of practitioners, brings in speakers on topics related to mentoring, and helps raise local awareness about mentoring as a strategy for helping poor kids. **New York Mentoring** provides similar services in New York City. In Wichita, Kansas, **Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Sedgwick County** received funding from the Knight Foundation to help coordinate mentoring activities and improve mentoring practices in that city.

OVERALL CONTOURS

There can be no question that, beginning in 1988 and developing over approximately two years, a full-fledged mentoring field has emerged, one that includes both program and support activities. The size of the field remains ever-changing and thus difficult to estimate; however, based on an informal tally, this new push has resulted in matches that probably equal the 60,000 currently sponsored by Big Brothers/Big Sisters.

In this complex mentoring field, several aspects of the topography stand out. Unlike the Big Brothers/Big Sisters movement, the current mentoring field is highly decentralized and extraordinarily diverse. Programs are mostly of the local variety, and

program models vary enormously. Some programs can be seen as singularly focused efforts where, in essence, the match is the program. Others are more complex, building a set of support activities around the mentoring relationship. Still others are add-ons, where mentoring is grafted onto existing youth programs. The sources for these efforts are also quite varied.

The mentoring field, again in contrast to the stable and mature Big Brothers/Big Sisters movement, is in a start-up phase. Programs are short-staffed, relying on the dedication of their founders. Enthusiasm outstrips knowledge, and funding is rickety and uneven.

V. EXPLORING MENTORING'S RISE

The mentoring movement's sudden popularity as a strategy for helping disadvantaged youth calls for explanation. Why has this movement arisen, and why now? As the movement's diversity and decentralized character suggest, its emergence can be traced to a number of causes: among them, the circumstances of disadvantaged youth, the frustration and needs of middle class adults, and mentoring's inherent appeal, so evident in its long history.

YOUTH ADRIFT

In explaining their own motives, the movement's proponents cite the growing isolation of young people from caring adult contact.

One PLUS One, the Public Broadcasting System's project to stimulate mentoring, articulates this perspective, stressing mentoring's urgency because "millions of kids" are starving for adult attention."[1] This absence of attention is portrayed as stunting youth academically, vocationally and developmentally.

However, many of mentoring's supporters further argue that the isolation of youth, particularly young people growing up in poverty, is a problem for society as well, a society that must be concerned about the quality of its future work force. Emphasizing this perspective, One to One contends that the isolation of youth will contribute to the "growing scarcity of new workers with adequate basic skills," a shortage that "threatens our economic vitality."[2]

This prospect is accompanied by a third concern, the possibility of social breakdown. One to One voices worry about the "quality of life" in our communities, and about young people "disconnected from the mainstream of society," who will "further exacerbate the divisions within our nation." Along with other proponents of mentoring, they raise the specter of a generation of antisocial youth with little stake in society.

The isolation of youth that One PLUS One and the others decry has been identified by most observers of children and adolescents in our society as a very real problem. Widespread family breakdown, the erosion of many neighborhood ties, and the time demands of work--for adults and for many youth--have driven a wedge between the generations. As psychologist Laurence Steinberg of Temple University asserts, "Few young people in America today have even one significant, close relationship with a non-familial adult before reaching adulthood themselves."[3]

An accumulation of evidence suggests that children in poverty are suffering from a second, even more severe isolation--one of social class. Sociologist William Julius Wilson and others re-

searching inner-city neighborhoods have warned that impoverished youth growing up in these communities no longer have access to the range of middle and working class adults who served as role models to the preceding generation. According to Wilson, these role models "helped keep alive the perception that education is meaningful, that steady employment is a viable alternative to welfare, and that family stability is the norm, not the exception."[4]

This isolation not only results in incomplete socialization and foreclosed opportunities for young people in poverty, but leaves them to face an unprecedented level of misery, to confronting daily violence, deprivation and destructive temptation. Their immediate quality of life is often deplorable.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Despite the terrible realities of youth isolation, it would be a mistake to attribute the rise of mentoring entirely to unmet needs. Needs alone do not make a social movement. Equally important to mentoring's emergence are cultural and social currents circulating through the lives of middle-class adults.

Even growing awareness about the isolation of poor kids can be traced as much to circumstances of mainstream adults as to those of poor youth. In recent years, we have seen a universalization of the conditions of poverty, as middle-class parents are increasingly forced to raise children while working. They, too, must cope with stress and the loss of adequate social support. The difficulty these families are encountering in spending time with their own children makes more believable the isolation of poor children and more compelling the warnings about its deleterious effects.

Even more significant for mentoring's rise is a growing impulse to help among a segment of the middle class. This impulse may be the pent-up idealism that Arthur Schlesinger identifies as part of Americans' cyclical response to poverty. In rare agreement with the liberal Schlesinger, William F. Buckley too detects a population eager to express a "civic sense of obligation."[5] Supporting both Schlesinger and Buckley are a number of recent polls, including a Gallup survey commissioned by the nonprofit group Independent Sector, which found growing interest in voluntarism and charitable giving, particularly among adults of the "baby boom" generation.[6]

It is also possible to see this rise as a generational phenomenon, since the "boomers" behind this altruistic impulse came of age in the socially concerned 1960s. As the director of the Independent Sector study suggests, "These influences add up to more charitable giving and more volunteering for community service."

However, the current revival of responsibility among some middle-class adults--an impulse often described by mentors as the desire "to make a difference"--may also be a reaction to the 1980s: the vast gulfs that opened up between rich and poor (and between rich and middle class) and the visible consequences of cutbacks in government spending on social services. These societal changes have all helped generate a reaction not dissimilar to that which animated Friendly Visiting and the Big Brothers/Big Sisters movement.

In fact, a select group of millionaires, assuming responsibility for classes of poor children around the country, became an important catalyst in the formation of the mentoring movement. Eugene Lang, first and most influential, widely dramatized the practice and promise of taking responsibility for poor children, helping to create a sense of hope at a time when hope was in short supply, through his I Have a Dream project. Lang, a self-made millionaire, returned to his East Harlem elementary school, half-a-century after he had left, to deliver the commencement address. He ended up issuing a spontaneous promise to the graduating class of sixth-graders: to pay for their college education if they completed high school and gained admission to college.

Lang's initiative has not only been covered extensively in the media, it has served as the impetus for hundreds of millionaires around the country to reproduce this project and variations on it. Financier Ray Chambers, founder of One to One and co-chair of the Points of Light Foundation, is among people who attribute their current activism to Lang.

It is not surprising that in the midst of the 1980s--a decade that glorified wealth and the wealthy--a set of millionaires should be cast in the role of social action heroes. However, Lang used the limelight not only to encourage the assumption of personal responsibility, but also to emphasize that the key ingredient of his success was getting personally involved in a mentor-like role with young people.

Despite their popularity, programs like Lang's generate tough questions: How many millionaires are ready to do what Lang has done? What about the kids not lucky enough to have a millionaire benefactor? What might the average person do to help? Many organizations, corporations and cities have responded to these questions by "democratizing the Dream," by creating mentoring programs where individuals interested in helping--but without the means to adopt an entire class of students--could take responsibility for a single youth. Indeed many of the most prominent mentoring efforts around the country, such as Milwaukee's One on One, began as attempts to reproduce the I Have a Dream project. Assessment of the Lang model has only just begun, with P/PV's evaluation of three classes of "Dreamers" in Washington, D.C., funded by the MacArthur Foundation, the Commonwealth Fund and an anonymous donor.

GETTING INVOLVED

I've done a lot of volunteer work and work with nonprofits, such as sitting on boards. But I wasn't getting the kind of satisfaction that I wanted out of it. I wanted to try a one-on-one situation. But another part of it is--it is my way of giving back for all the people who helped me. I was the first one in my family to go to college, and it took a lot of people helping me along the way, in terms of support and encouragement and guidance, particularly when I was in high school. I didn't have the least idea about how to make choices or career plans or any of those things. For the people who did help me, this is sort of my casual way of putting back what they gave to me. **(Cleveland)**

I'm a '60s radical who got stuck in a time warp. I feel very strongly that if I can contribute something, if I can take what I've been able to do in my life and use those skills and that time to benefit somebody else, especially children who don't have the kind of breaks I had, I feel better about myself, about the community.

I have volunteered in the past for a variety of social causes--trying to address the plague of the homeless, protesting the war in Vietnam, civil rights--global kind of stuff. But with a one-to-one relationship with an individual over an appreciable period of time, the results can be much more tangible--although they can also be painfully slow in coming. **(Milwaukee)**

Shayne [the program director] and I used to talk about what was wrong with the world, and we always used to say that if somebody could just hold these kids' hands sometimes--not drag them along, but just walk along with them--maybe a lot of them would find their way. When she called me, it was like a call to my conviction; do you really believe what you're saying?
(Washington, D.C.)

I see it as a way of reaching back to the neighborhood. If I can help one guy make something out of himself, that's one less guy I think has potential of NOT making something out of himself. If I didn't do it and I had the opportunity to do it, I would feel bad. **(Philadelphia)**

I used to lead a professional life where I felt I was serving the public. I was in VISTA, in legal services, then in the government for a long time. I've been in private law practice for about three-and-a-half years and it's a little hard to believe you're doing much for society. So I wanted to continue doing things that I thought were worthwhile.

What's going on is a lot of people seeking types of service opportunities that would get them involved in some sense of community--whether it's working with the homeless, working on AIDS issues or doing some sort of mentoring. **(Washington, D.C.)**

MAKING A CONNECTION

The desire to make a difference, described by so many mentors and by those initiating mentoring programs, is only one of the impulses behind this movement. Alongside this desire is a parallel one, to make a connection, to reach out in a personal, direct and immediate way.

In the mid-19th century, Alexis de Tocqueville commented that American life tends to isolate citizens "within the solitude" of their own hearts.[7] In interviews with contemporary middle-class adults, individuals in many respects similar to the group that has come forward to mentor, sociologist Robert Bellah and a group of colleagues have located a middle-class population locked in similar solitude, and experiencing a deeply felt yearning for connection.

In Habits of the Heart, the researchers found that: "Few of those with whom we talked have found a life devoted to 'personal ambition and consumerism' satisfactory, and most are seeking in one way or another to transcend the limitations of a self-centered life." In particular, they conclude, "There is in the desire for intense relationships with others an attempt to move beyond the isolated self."[8]

A range of investigators have supported Bellah and his colleagues in identifying this yearning for connection. Psychologists interested in adult development have found a welling need for generativity, the need to transfer knowledge and culture that Erik Erikson identified among adults in mid-life.[9] In an applied context, focus groups among "baby boomers" have located a strong preference for voluntarism involving direct contact and personal relationships.[10] Mentoring appears to draw on and reflect this desire to help in an immediate and very personal way.

AN APPEALING VESSEL

Mentoring has emerged as an appealing vehicle to address both the isolation of youth from adult contact and the incompleteness that many middle-class adults find in their own lives. In the words of one practitioner, it offers a way to tap "a very, very live spirit in association with a recognized need."

And mentoring comes amid a shortage of such vehicles for matching spirit and need. Indeed, as Nicholas Lemann remarks, despite growing sentiment in favor of "reestablishing the social linkages" between the poor and the rest of society, there are few avenues to make the connection.[11]

Mentoring offers a set of timely and attractive properties that help explain its emergence as a means to achieve social linkage.

First, mentoring appears **simple**. The "one to one" concept takes an overwhelming set of social problems, such as poverty, and makes them comprehensible by focusing on the needs of a single youngster. One group states: "Maybe you can't change the world, but you can make a difference in the future of at least one young person."[12] In this way, mentoring personalizes responsibility and allows the individual to act. As another mentoring program tells prospective volunteers: "There is at least one teenager in this city who may not make it to college...without you."[13]

Second, mentoring is **direct**. Mentoring simultaneously satisfies a sense of urgency and a desire to cut through red tape to help youth directly. Mentoring stands in apparent opposition to public institutions and policies for youth, particularly schools and social programs, whose popularity and reputation for solving social problems have been in eclipse for some time.

While these institutions might seem to offer adult contact to young people, they are widely perceived, often accurately, to be what one educator calls "impersonal teaching factories," places where individuals are, in the words of another educator, "melting into ciphers."[14] Education reform efforts emphasizing testing and standards, have done little to dispel this perception and have likely exacerbated this reality.

Mentoring's third appeal emanates in part from the perception that, in a time of federal funding constraints and local budget cutbacks, mentoring is **cheap**, a low-cost alternative to public services. Mentoring plays to the temptation to bypass public institutions entirely and go straight to the individual, to reform youth rather than tangling with the economy and entrenched institutions.

Fourth, mentoring is a highly **sympathetic** notion. Being dubbed a "mentor" is neither neutral nor objective, like "tutor" or "volunteer." It is an honor that flatters the volunteer, since mentoring taps into a venerable mythology in our culture that is invariably portrayed in a positive light.

The positive perception of mentors has been further boosted by a renaissance that the mentoring notion has enjoyed in popular culture. In recent years, Burt Reynolds, Robert Duvall, Marlon Brando and Paul Newman have all played mentors in Hollywood films. In 1990, the Italian film Cinema Paradiso won an Academy Award for its endearing depiction of th mentoring relationship between a gruff, childless film projectionist and a young boy whose father was killed in World War II. At the same time, Robert Bly's message that modern men need more mentors has made Iron John into a best-seller and has led to a round of backwoods retreats that have drawn an estimated 50,000 men nationwide.

Fifth, mentoring is seen as **legitimate.** It is a sanctioned role for unrelated adults to play in the lives of youth, as reflected by the many stories that help maintain its honored place in our culture. Big Brothers/Big Sisters helped give it additional legitimacy as a role that could be engineered through social programs. This group maintains one of the highest levels of name recognition of any organization in America and can boast a list of honorary chairs that includes not only the current President and First Lady, but presidents and dignitaries stretching back to Theodore Roosevelt.

Without Big Brothers/Big Sisters' work in bringing together unrelated adults and children in private, personal, one-to-one relationships, it is hard to imagine that a mentoring movement could ever have been launched. Concerns about infringing on parents' prerogatives and about potential abuse would simply have been too formidable.

And finally, mentoring is **flexible**, accommodating whatever attributes people want to give it. Nearly everyone can find something to like in mentoring. At one level, mentoring speaks to the American traditions of individual achievement, progress and optimism. It is connected to an improved work force and economic competitiveness, what one observer terms "kids as capital." At the same time, mentoring has another, more subtle allure. This aspect speaks to yearning for community lost, to a time of greater civility and responsibility for strangers.

All these factors combine to explain why mentoring has drawn such a diverse group of proponents, encompassing liberals and conservatives, blacks and whites, Republicans and Democrats, and why it has produced a level of good will that partially protects mentoring from the broader controversy surrounding voluntarism. These factors further account not only for mentoring's meteoric rise, but for the euphoric set of expectations that have attended it.

VI. GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Given mentoring's appeal, it is not surprising that the current mentoring movement has spawned not only a flurry of activity, but enormous expectations for its effectiveness in helping disadvantaged youth--in other words, great fervor. Laying out the stakes, the One to One Foundation tells us: "Our nation today faces some of the most serious human and social problems in its history." In response, the Foundation offers mentoring as "the best hope."[1]

Keynoting the first National Mentoring Conference, Secretary of Labor Elizabeth Dole supplied historical import, reminding her audience that the individuals who founded this country "did so at a risk to their very lives." In turn, she asserted, we are required "by history to give ourselves...to the call of mentoring."

According to Dole, this call is in order because mentoring "can keep kids in school, turn young lives around, impact on the social problems of our time, improve the quality of our work force, and ensure America's continued competitiveness." Calling mentoring a "great force," Dole concluded that it was "not a bad day's work."[2]

Such a highly charged challenge is present as well in Commonwealth Fund President Margaret Mahoney's question, "Is there any greater challenge for the individual adult in America today [than] serving as a mentor?"[3] One PLUS One weighs in with a book, The Power of Mentoring, filled with inspirational anecdotes of lives transformed.[4]

With such fanfare--best hope, power, great force and renaissance--mentoring gets impressive billing. Indeed, the fervor surrounding mentoring for youth is not unlike the enthusiasm that attended mentoring's appearance in the corporate world a decade ago, or the predictions that surrounded Friendly Visiting a century earlier.

Recalling the "tidal wave" of 100,000 Visitors envisioned by civic leaders in the 1870s and 1880s, mentoring's proponents have promised numbers befitting a great force. The magic number for the current movement is one million. One foundation executive argues that President Bush's speech writer Peggy Noonan "had the right idea, but the wrong mathematics," and has upped the call to "several million 'points of light.'"[5]

Another leader of the mentoring movement explains the urgency of realizing such a goal. From a review of research, he finds that mentoring is one of five strategies that "works....over and over and over again, essentially for every child." With this perspective, he identifies the number of mentors needed: "We looked at

the research information and came up with the figure: a million. A million every year. A million mentors a year, because a million kids come along every year who need mentors."[6]

In this same numerical vein, the Department of Labor has initiated a project challenging 5,000 businesses to ante up 10 percent of their employees as mentors.[7] The One to One group not only wants a million mentors nationally, but 100,000 in Philadelphia alone.[8]

TURNING LIVES AROUND

While portrayed as a mass movement, mentoring is also seen as a powerful force in the case of individual lives. An article in The Washington Post, "Turning Young Lives Around," illustrates this perspective with the story of 17-year-old Sean Varner and his mentor, Washington, D.C. physician John Hogan:

> Sean Varner's family lived in a shelter for the homeless. The teenager owned few clothes, was failing in school and considering dropping out. Then John Hogan entered his life.
>
> "I needed someone to talk to" said Varner, now 17 and a senior at McKinley High School in Northeast. "I couldn't talk to my mother and I've only seen my father once. It was the lowest point I ever reached."
>
> Hogan, a doctor who works in the emergency rooms of Howard University and D.C. General Hospitals, became Varner's mentor. They were matched 18 months ago....
>
> With Hogan's encouragement and support, Varner turned his life around.
>
> This year, Varner earned the highest score at McKinley on the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test. A host of colleges are courting him. His conversations are peppered with talk about his future, about college and a career as an engineer.
>
> What happened to Sean Varner illustrates how concerned adults are touching the lives of troubled youth around the country through mentoring programs. It's the perfect answer for a generation of people who have time to volunteer and a desire to help solve some of the problems plaguing young people in inner cities.[9]

This heroic portrait of mentoring is far from unique. One PLUS One circulates the story of Robert, a middle-class white mentor, and Malcolm, a disadvantaged black student. Reflecting on their time together, Robert comments that: "Malcolm is easy to know.

Talking with him, being with him, listening to him is not a chore." In fact, he says: "The year we spent together went well. Malcolm is grateful to me, but he isn't aware that it was I who gained the most." Robert learned: "I do have time for the Malcolms of the world. My career and life didn't come apart because of the time we spent together... I learned that sometimes the most important qualification of being a mentor is simply being there when needed."[10]

In their manual for mentoring, Partnerships for Success, the United Way of America and the Enterprise Foundation supply another archetypal mentoring story, that of Evelyn and Paige: "Not long ago, Evelyn could not read or write. She was the third generation of her family to become dependent on welfare. Her children seemed likely to repeat the pattern."

However, Evelyn says that her life began to change the day a friend referred her to Literacy Volunteers, a United Way agency that connected her to Paige, a mentor from the other side of the tracks. Evelyn states: "I needed a person out there to help me because I did not know all the people who could help me stay off welfare."

Soon things began to turn around: "Over the months, Evelyn's skills and confidence began to grow. She learned how to get help, as well as to solve her own problems. Progress wasn't easy. Some of Evelyn's 'friends' on welfare questioned her actions, put her down, even threatened her. But with the support of Paige, and her sympathetic welfare caseworker Louise, Evelyn moved ahead."

Eventually, Evelyn became assistant manager of a corporate cafeteria. According to Partnerships for Success, the story of Evelyn and Paige "summarizes what can happen when one caring individual volunteers to mentor another."[11]

THE NEW MYTHOLOGY

The fervor that surrounds mentoring takes its strength from these stories, then builds through sweeping claims about the scale on which it can work. Both the larger vision and the individual success stories contribute to an overarching mythology about what mentoring programs will accomplish. It is worth stepping back from these claims and stories to distill the key elements that constitute the new mythology.

Mentoring is easy: As the published reflections of John, Robert and Paige show, it is easy to overlook the frustrations and difficulties that mentors may experience. Also, programs downplay negatives in recruiting mentors. One program tells mentors it is "easy to make a difference in one kid's life."[12] Another adds, "The time you spend is just four hours per month. The students

are willing participants. Their parents are supportive. Success is practically guaranteed."[13]

Mentoring is cheap: To draw on Ronald Reagan's description of voluntarism, this strategy is something to be accomplished "out of the goodness of our hearts." While proponents freely project the number of volunteers who will serve, they are far less inclined to discuss mentoring's costs. One official warns about "program developers [who] insist that a whole series of related services be tagged onto" mentoring programs, services that will "eventually price themselves out of the market." He cautions particularly about the use of staff.[14]

Mentoring is a mass movement: Mentoring is to be done by a million mentors a year, a mentor for every at-risk youth in America annually. Correcting Peggy Noonan's arithmetic will amount to an exponential increase of current one-to-one efforts.

Mentoring is for the truly disadvantaged: This strategy is for kids who are in desperate straits, like Sean Varner: homeless, impoverished youth, about to drop out, facing every imaginable obstacle. Thus, mentoring is about improving the life chances of the truly disadvantaged. According to One to One's Philadelphia action plan, mentoring combats "the emergence of a permanent underclass."[15]

Mentoring is a success strategy: Mentoring will impart self-esteem, improve SAT scores, break the cycle of welfare dependency, and generally reaffirm the principle that "everybody who makes it has a mentor." Particularly, it will prevent many youth from dropping out of school.

Mentoring is a powerhouse: Cheap, easy, widespread, focused on those most at risk, and capable of transforming lives, mentoring is a strategy equal to such considerable challenges as maintaining American competitiveness in the 21st century--and it is a bargain at that.

These claims are conspicuous not only for their scope and force, but for their timing; they arrived just when enthusiasm in the arena of social policy and education focused on the disadvantaged had reached a low point. Even time-honored and research-supported efforts, such as Head Start, have difficulty generating as much enthusiasm as mentoring.

VII. A MODEST INTERVENTION

Mentoring's ability to mobilize a diverse group of supporters and their dramatic claims for this strategy's transforming powers bring into focus the primary question that spurred this paper: What are a group of middle-class volunteers likely to accomplish by forming relationships with children and youth mired in poverty? While conclusive answers to this question will have to await completion of longer-term research, observation of programs, interviews with participants and staff, and a review of existing research converge to offer a sobering perspective on the expectations that have been raised for mentoring.

In examining the promise and prospects of mentoring, this chapter also draws on a group of particularly insightful commentators: the mentors themselves. These individuals constitute the heart of this movement, and their words offer a window on mentoring that illuminates the broader discussion.

HEARTENING INDICATIONS

The experience of mentoring programs is in many respects encouraging. They address the very real need among youth for adult caring and attention, create a framework for forging significant bonds within the context of programs, and offer the prospect of aiding individual youngsters in the process.

Their record to date suggests that adults and youth who do connect form bonds that fall into one of two broad categories: primary relationships and secondary relationships. Primary relationships are like kinship ties, distinguished by the presence of unconditional commitment and great intimacy; secondary relationships are "friendly" in nature, but limited in openness and intensity.[1]

Participants and observers alike describe a range of benefits accruing to youth in significant relationships. Their comments recall Uri Bronfenbrenner's definition of mentoring as a relationship focused on the development of <u>character and competence</u> in young people.[2] Mentors also reveal another important element in their role: the provision of <u>support</u> that improves the immediate quality of life for young people whose days are often very bleak.

<u>Developing Character</u>

Mentors work to develop character in youth by helping them navigate the path to adulthood. Often, this objective plays out in discussions of life skills, particularly in terms of relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends. Mentors talk about sex, pregnancy, responsibility, values. They challenge youth to de-

velop life goals and work toward their realization. Youth in secondary relationships tend to experience this aspect of mentoring in more limited and sporadic ways than those in primary relationships--relationships approximating the classical conception of mentoring.

Fostering Competence

Mentors also stress the development of competence in a variety of ways, most commonly through exposure to a range of new experiences. Mentors take youth to their workplaces, introduce them to their colleagues, and give them an inside glimpse of the world of work. Those working with older youth help them explore and define specific vocational and postsecondary educational interests. Mentors involved with younger kids try to get them to see the connection between doing well in school and improving future prospects.

The exposure that mentors provide is as much cultural as vocational, and many of the adults essentially provide a tour of middle-class life and institutions. They take youth to restaurants, orient them to the suburbs, show them how to set a dinner table and teach them how to dress for work.

Beyond exposing youth to options, many mentors actively try to help youth take advantage of opportunities. They tutor the youngsters, coach them on job interviews, investigate scholarships, take them to visit college campuses, get them internships. They advocate for them in a variety of situations, such as making sure they get the kind of treatment in school that middle-class kids have come to expect.

Providing Support

Mentors support youth emotionally by giving them someone they can talk to and spend time with. Mentors play basketball with the youth, take them to the zoo, invite them home for a barbecue, and engage in a range of activities, simply designed to be fun.

Mentors talk with the youngsters about mundane matters, but can also be there when things get rough--as one comments, when mentees are feeling "desperate and sorry and pitiful." Sometimes these feelings are a response to the vicissitudes of adolescent romance; at other times, they follow far more serious dislocation, such as violence, pregnancy and homelessness. In these situations and others, mentors spend a lot of time encouraging youth, counseling them, caring for them and expressing belief in them.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Robert and I seem to communicate well. We talk about things, we go to movies. His grandparents feel good about the relationship, which is very important. His grandmother was glad to see that another individual, another man, was willing to spend time with her grandson because his father is not around. The values were excellent fits. I think that's the key.

We started out talking about surface issues like basketball, sports, the general world. And as time went on, we got into speaking about girls, what to do about girls, life in general, how to go about getting a job. At some points, we talk about really decent things; other times, we talk about guy stuff--that's what a mentor's for. There were a couple of turning points, like when he said to me "Let's not go to the movies, why don't we go by the museum." If I had introduced that, it would seem kind of a drag.

His first question was: What do I have to do in this deal? He put the cards on the table. I said to him: What I'm looking to be is not your brother, and not your father--but to be an individual that when you grow up and you look back from where you are 10 years from now, you'll think of some of the things we did, some of the things I may have helped you with, some of the things we kind of agreed to do together, and say: that helped me get to where I am. **(Philadelphia)**

Mostly we go to my home--my daughter and husband are involved--and we do things together. My husband plays basketball with him, or they wash the car...we've gone to the zoo...he goes grocery shopping with me, helps set the table, just things he's not used to.

He's a nice boy, very easy to talk to, we get along fine. He is outgoing...opinionated...intelligent...fun...and his grades aren't bad either. His career goals are to be either a rapper or a basketball player. I say, you know you're short, I don't think there's much hope for a basketball career, and I'm really not sure there's really a career in rapping, so let's think of something else that we can work toward, just in case these two don't turn out. **(Baltimore)**

She is a very talented athlete as well as very bright and personable. Her track coach and I work together pretty closely. It's like, lets get her out of here to college, far away to college. We had her send applications to top colleges. The University of Arizona was very interested in her, so I got the company to pop for the ticket there. They offered her a scholarship, and she has signed a letter of intent with them.

When I was taking her to the airport, she was kind of bewildered about how this was happening and she said, well, why would somebody do this for me? And I said, because they want to help you succeed, because you have a lot of potential and we want to make sure you have the opportunities. And she says, but they don't even know me. She was shaking her head about this and she said, I hope someday I'll be able to do something like this for somebody. **(Cleveland)**

You have to assume there's some cause/effect because his absentee rate from school has dropped dramatically over the year and his grade point average has gone up. In fact, for the first time in his six or seven years of school, he was on the honor role. I don't know if that's me, but we spend most of our time working on his homework. If he's got homework, he's just dying to do his homework. If he doesn't have homework, he seems to enjoy being read to and I love reading aloud. **(Milwaukee)**

When she decided that she was not going back to school, that's when her mother called me. All of us tried to encourage her, but she continued to stick with it. I said some pretty tough things to her. But I also said I'm here for you whichever way you decide. If she was going to slam the door, that would have been the time. But she stayed in there with me.

If I've made a difference in her life, it's been around babies and boyfriends. We got into a pretty intense conversation about that one: she said she decided she wasn't going to have any children until she was 19. I had to catch myself because I realized that everybody on her street except her is pregnant or has been pregnant and is working on the second child. Nineteen is a long time away for their frame of reference. I finally said that sounds good, but I don't hear you saying anything about being married, having a husband to father this baby.

These kids, they really do need somebody to talk to. Not so much somebody to hug and hold them necessarily. But somebody to bounce their thoughts off of, and to know they're not the only ones feeling desperate and sorry and pitiful today, that this boyfriend that broke their heart is not the absolute end to their lives. They can't get that kind of feedback from other 15-year-olds. **(Washington, D.C.)**

She's a nice girl: very polite, very bright, articulate. I feel very attached, and fortunately we hit it off. But sometimes I feel like she's blowing smoke in my face. She likes me so much that she doesn't want to disappoint me, so she says things that she knows I want to hear, but she doesn't follow through. She dropped out of school just before the 10th grade this year and went to live with her boyfriend and his family. I finally got her to go back in January, but she dropped out again. So the program suggested I take another student who's in school. But you can't desert her now; she needs mentoring more than ever. **(Philadelphia)**

Steven got suspended. Three or four kids were throwing ketchup in the lunch room. Not a life-threatening event, but he got suspended. His mother did not know the rules. Like most people, she thought that if you're suspended, you're automatically out of school for three days. In reality, a mother can just call the principal; if the event is not serious, the student is reinstated immediately. I found out about the suspension the second day, and got Steven's mother to call. He was let back into school right away, and only missed a day. **(Baltimore)**

The Master Key

Ronald Ferguson of the Kennedy School at Harvard argues, based on observation of community-based mentoring programs around the country, that mentoring relationships, especially primary relationships, can provide "the master key" in reaching disadvan taged youth: "When youths know that adults really care and are not simply 'in it for the money' (a recurring phrase) they usually lower their defenses, pay attention, and accept help."

Ferguson believes that adults who achieve this level of closeness and trust are in a position "to expand children's knowledge of options, to inform them about the strategies necessary for exploiting these options, to teach them the skills necessary for implementing the strategies, and to lead them toward the values that favor the most developmentally healthy choices."[3]

In other words, a primary relationship may go beyond discrete help, immediate quality of life, and other short- and intermediate-term assistance to provide a foundation for a young person's development, attitudes and behaviors with potentially longer-term implications.

SOBERING REALITIES

As heartening as it is to affirm that mentoring programs can result in relationships that make a difference for some youth--that mentoring is "for real"--the experience of these programs nevertheless provides eloquent testimony to the difficulty of doing either. Quite simply, mentoring is hard, a reality rarely conveyed amid all the fervor surrounding this movement.

It's Hard to Connect

In the first place, the struggle is often simply to forge a connection. After calling a random selection of mentors a year into the program, A.C. Hubbard, board chair of Project RAISE in Baltimore, was shocked at how few were still involved: "I found a lot of frustration or inability to get through to kids, or that their time was such that they couldn't meet what we thought was a minimum.... A lot of them felt guilty."

Al Abromovitz, Director of Cleveland's Career Beginnings site, said that he now shoots for a 50 percent connection rate, but admits that "if we have 180 matches and 70 are working, I'm happy." He used to lament these numbers until somebody pointed out that they compared favorably with the divorce rate.

An informal survey of other program operators suggests that the connection rate, the proportion of matches that turn into significant relationships, varies by program, but probably hovers somewhere around one-third overall. One program operator described a high incidence of "phantom mentors."

Researchers echo these observations. Stephen Hamilton and Mary Agnes Hamilton of Cornell University began their study of the mentoring program Linking Up "to understand and trace the formation of mentoring relationships." However, after surveying the program's actual experience, they shifted their focus: "We sought instead to understand why so many pairs did not seem to be working out."[4]

Ronald Ferguson, too, found volunteer mentoring to be a struggle in most community programs. While "most programs hoped to use volunteer mentors to supplement the love and attention that their paid staffs provide to children," they were plagued by recruitment and attrition problems. Ferguson adds, "Those that have tried have experienced only limited success at finding mentors and keeping them active."[5]

The experience of programs points to two problems that make it difficult for mentors and youth to connect: limited time and social distance. First, mentoring is bound up in a paradox concerning time. Much of mentoring's currency emanates from the growing concern that adults in our society are too busy to spend time with kids. However, in the words of Hamilton and Hamilton, efforts to "fill the gap run directly into the problems that created it."[6] The adults who volunteer as mentors don't have time to spend with the young people with whom they are matched.

This problem is particularly acute because the adults targeted by mentoring programs are often the same individuals whose work soaks up all their time. These are lawyers, managers, physicians and other professionals who are putting in 60, 70 or even 80 hours a week on the job and often do not have time to spend with their own kids.

Given the competing commitments and countervailing forces pulling at these mentors, it is no surprise that even the most committed and exceptional mentors find it challenging to sustain their involvement. In general, mentors are much better at signing up than showing up.

However, the failure to connect comes not just from mentors, but from students as well. Forging a relationship takes two people, and programs have experienced just as much difficulty getting young people to show up and stick with it.

First, many youth are wary of adults--having been let down by them in the past, and living in environments where violence and other forms of abuse are common. Furthermore, mentoring is often an unfamiliar notion to these youth. Taken together, it is not surprising that many young people are slow to embrace these relationships, and that the initiative often rests with the mentors.

However, it is often difficult to contact youth living in poverty. Many do not have a telephone, much less an answering machine. And teenagers are notoriously bad about returning phone calls, even when they get the message and have access to a phone.

The difficulty in getting middle-class mentors and disadvantaged youth to spend sufficient time together is all the more problematic because of the great gulfs that exist between their worlds. Mentors and youth must bridge this gulf before they can forge a connection. As one adult observes, "We mentors represent such a foreign life to them....I know she hears what I say, she remembers things, and she attempts to ask questions...but the connection is limited."

This comment cuts to the issue of social distance, present in varying degrees in most orchestrated mentoring relationships that bring together mainstream adults and youth in poverty. This distance begins with a generation gap. It is often accentuated by lifestyle differences, and in many cases, by ethnic background as well. But the most profound distance, which is shared by mentors of varying ages and ethnic backgrounds, is that of class.

The successful "role models" targeted as mentors often have little in common with the youth. Unfamiliar worlds collide; different languages are spoken. The partners react in ways that are perplexing to each other. Often neither has known anyone like the other before. Not surprisingly, the potential for misunderstanding is considerable.

In reviewing the literature on mentoring, Ascher, Flaxman and Harrington of Columbia University's Institute on Urban and Minority Education comment that in settings where social distance is great, the mentors' world can easily seem "irrelevant or even nonsensical" to the youngsters, "and their goals for the mentees naive."[7]

It's Hard to Make a Difference

While some youth clearly benefit from mentoring, often in rather dramatic ways, the research record is mixed.

A survey of Career Beginnings participants found that many adults and youth felt good about the experience and identified important benefits.[8] A study of the Adopt-A-Student program in Atlanta found that students with mentors were more likely than a comparison group to enroll in postsecondary education.[9] A Public/Private Ventures study of programs that enrolled older adults as mentors found that the young people with whom they worked showed a wide array of benefits, including a new sense of their own competence.[10]

However, these study results must be qualified. Another study of Career Beginnings by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation showed that participating youth went on to college at only slightly higher rates than controls.[11] An evaluation of Atlanta's Adopt-A-Student effort found that participants were no more likely to graduate from high school or be employed than students without mentors. And the P/PV study of intergenerational mentoring warns of the small size of the programs examined and the bias of self-selection, particularly among mentors.

Studies of Baltimore's Project RAISE and Milwaukee's One on One program have also produced mixed results. In the latter study, a local research firm concluded that "most students in the program did not show an improvement in grades during the program year, although this was one of the program's primary objectives."[12] In the former case, Johns Hopkins researchers found that most RAISE students remained far below average for Baltimore County schools in academic performance and were at risk of dropping out. These results led the program's managers to reevaluate their goals in light of "too many deficits to be overcome... [and] too few resources."[13]

Echoing these evaluations, participants and program operators suggest that it is often just as difficult "to make a difference" as it is "to make a connection."

First, the formidable realities of poverty exercise considerable influence on the prospects of young people growing up in low-income, inner-city neighborhoods. Although the testimony of mentors and others underscores the point that mentoring addresses real and profound needs, these needs are often so profound that mentoring can seem, in the words of one mentor, like a "drop in the bucket."

A businessman and mentor in Milwaukee's One on One program considers his own experience and that of fellow Rotary Club members who have come forward to volunteer:

> None of us understood the kind of kids that we'd be working with and the challenges that would be brought forth. We had these expectations, you know. We're all pretty macho. We'd walk in there and we figured, at least I did, that if I just lend this young person a little bit of the wonderfulness that I have in my brain, that they're automatically going to respond and be terrific. And the reality is that it is absolutely not true.

This mentor concludes that mentoring will not make a great impact on a great number of students. He feels this way because "we're talking about survival of these kids, trying to bring them

STRUGGLING THROUGH

It was kind of a shell-shock for me: I'd never really ridden into the city. Not that I come from an affluent neighborhood; I'm from a working-class family, but I never really wanted for anything. To see what some of these children have to go through to get a decent pair of shoes or a pair of glasses! These aren't frivolous things that they want, these are basic needs, and they don't have them. How some of these young people live and survive surprises me.

It's highly recommended that I don't meet him at home (in the projects) so I meet him at school or pick him up at a place that's pretty populated. His mother was out of the picture for awhile. She was in jail at one time and that's when the father got custody. I met him at one of the social events and tried to speak to him. I didn't get anything out of him, and the coordinator advised me to leave him alone...he's violent. I'm a little scared of him, having a little one myself. **(Baltimore)**

He lives about eight blocks from where I grew up. The neighborhood was bad 15 years ago, but you'd have to call that fun compared to today's standards. It's much harder now and much more dangerous.

At times, this seems like a tremendous burden. At the firm, we've had some bad experiences in the sense that the child didn't want to be in the program, or their parents didn't want them to be in the program, or it just didn't work out on the personality mix. We now have only six strong relationships. Six is better than none, but it's not as great as 15 or 20--that's what we started out with. **(Philadelphia)**

She has a lot of things going for her and a lot of things to overcome--her whole family situation. The week before the SATs, her mother moved out of their apartment and farmed her out to her grandmother. So the SATs didn't come out to what they should be. Her mother's boyfriend moved in the day after her father was killed, and the murder was unsolved. She and her brother think the boyfriend had something to do with it. So she doesn't feel she can own her feelings about the loss of her father to her mother.

It's still hard for us to bridge socioeconomic gaps, even after two years. There's probably a lot I will never be able to understand about her life, but there's also a lot that she still wants to keep from me. Partly I think it's her sense of sparing me, partly it's embarrassment, and partly it's her own blocking process.

A mentoring program may end up really being worse than having no mentors at all, because if people aren't prepared, they drop out. And Karen has told me about her friends at school in the program. One has a mentor that she's never met, who just calls her on the phone. What does that tell the student? That she's not good enough or important enough that this person didn't even take the trouble to meet her? Then there's another one. Her mentor just dropped out in the middle, no closure, nothing. That's worse than no mentor at all, because what you did was you raised expectations, then dashed them again. For these children, it's betrayal of trust over and over again. **(Cleveland)**

One of the tendencies you have when you get into a program like this is to expect to walk in, change the face of this human being's prospects immediately--to be a hero, a role model, to do all kinds of wonderful things, and in short order. If I had gone in with that expectation, I would be extremely disappointed, because it hasn't happened.

This young man is utterly lacking in social graces. Not a word of thanks is uttered. When he got on the honor roll, I was planning to do something very special for him. The day of the tutoring session, I told him how proud I was of him and his achievement. Just before he left, he said he wanted a reward. I was so disappointed; I had planned to do something, until it became a demand. I take it very personally. **(Milwaukee)**

Brenda and I have struggled. The first issue was trust. I had to do almost all the calling for about six to eight months into the program. Now, she'll call here and there. It's hard to get her to talk--we are two personalities that tend not to talk--so it took a little while and we still don't interact the way I envisioned it going. **(Washington, D.C.)**

The other thing that has been more overwhelming to me is how difficult it is to take somebody on at this late stage and try to bring a focus into their lives. I started with Kevin when he had just finished the 10th grade, and I have come to the conclusion that's just too late; you just can't turn things around at that point. It's just very sad how little these kids learn, how little they know, how low the expectations are for them.

Part of the problem with dealing with some of these kids is the inconsistency between what their expectations are and what their performance is. I don't know whether he is going to get his act together. His grades are just as bad, he really doesn't understand what he has to do to end up where he wants. So what am I in this for? If I can't be successful--meaning developing his discipline, getting him on the right track--maybe it's too late. And if it's too late, it doesn't make sense for me to be spending my time at it.

I've been surprised by the extent to which I feel I've been all alone in this. I've not been in any kind of support network. They're so overwhelmed, the people at the school. There's no very good mechanism for getting any focus on one kid and what his problems may be. **(Washington, D.C.)**

Based on what I see today, as opposed to the situation 10 years ago when I was a Big Sister, I'm very pessimistic. I've seen public housing for many years, and it's much worse. I've seen the social and intellectual environment in which these children are growing up, and it's much worse. I'm appalled by the state of education. I am appalled by the social family setting in which most of these children are being raised. **(Baltimore)**

You have to be the type of person that's not going to be discouraged. You want to throw in the towel so often, especially when you feel like you're not getting through. A lot of times, you feel like you're in this thing by yourself. The kids are so used to people not sticking around that they figure, well, this is just another one. **(Philadelphia)**

from...utter failure and utter chaos, to a place where they have some self-esteem and self-image and hopefulness."

One Philadelphia mentor grew up in the same inner-city neighborhood as the student he is mentoring. He recalls how tough it was 15 years ago, but adds, "you'd have to call that fun compared to today's standards." Another mentor describes the challenges she's confronting in trying to help her student in 1990 Baltimore, comparing it with 1980 Houston, where she was a Big Sister to a girl living in public housing. The deterioration of conditions in public housing and the "social and intellectual environment in which these children are growing up" leaves her far less optimistic than she felt 10 years earlier.

Most of these mentors are forced to accept that, given present circumstances, the prospects of dramatic change, of recreating the Sean Varner/John Hogan saga of success, are limited. In this spirit, Ascher, Flaxman and Harrington warn that while youth may be isolated, they do not reside in a vacuum. These researchers caution that mentoring will not "pluck adolescents out of poor homes, inadequate schools, or disruptive communities....Thus the power of other influences in the lives of youth must be recognized in any attempt to reasonably measure the potential accomplishments of mentoring." They conclude that this strategy is best seen as a "modest intervention."

Susan Phillips, director of the Greater Milwaukee Education Trust, which oversees the One on One mentoring program, concurs: "If you've got a child who's been failed since kindergarten... your chances of turning that child around in less than a year are nearly impossible." Even mentors in strong relationships discover that they are only one influence among many; these young lives are not easily transformed.[14]

The Risks of Failure for Youth and Adults

A June 12, 1990 article in The Wall Street Journal begins: "As any pupil who has brought the teacher an apple can testify," the mentoring process can be "fitfully complex" and filled with potential frictions. The article continues, "When these relationships work, they're fabulous. But when they don't work, they can be terribly destructive."[15]

This is a rare observation: the pitfalls of mentoring are usually ignored. Sharan Merriam notes that in the corporate world, "only successful mentoring relationships have been reported."[16]

Reluctance to address the down sides and risks of mentoring characterizes the current wave of youth mentoring as well. For the most part, mentoring is portrayed, in the words of one USA Today headline, as a "win-win proposition."[17]

Yet, in reality, both sides in mentoring programs risk losses. When acknowledged, the risks are usually posed as related to abuse, particularly sexual abuse. The most prevalent risks of mentoring, however, are less tangible.

On one side, the young people participating in mentoring programs are accustomed to being let down by adults, but are being asked to trust yet again. When the youth do let their guard down, they are all too often disappointed by mentors who keep them at arm's length, who don't show up, who don't follow through.

On the adult side, disappointment is also destructive, even if it is less willingly admitted or discussed. Art Murchison, a youthworker in the One on One program in Milwaukee, is blunt in asking: "What are mentors going to do when one of these kids--and I've had it happen to me--turns around and calls them a dirty MF?"

Shayne Schneider, founder of Mentors, Inc. in Washington, D.C., answers: "Their feelings get hurt. They say that they don't, but I believe they do." Schneider tries to warn people in advance about the distinct possibility that youth will be resistant, indifferent or even hostile: "I tell them all the reasons why teenagers don't return phone calls, but they still think it's that their kid doesn't like them." This is true for some of the most prominent mentors: "They come in like executives and they never let you know or never want to let you know how easily hurt they are. But many of the mentors who withdraw from the programs do so because their feelings have been hurt."

Almost all the programs contacted for this paper had stories of busy mentors who repeatedly took off from work to meet with their students, only to be stood up. And while Schneider admits that having your feelings hurt is "not a disaster like a nuclear war," she says that hurt can lead to anger and to the reinforcement of prejudice. Mentors often harbor dual feelings toward the youth, feelings of sympathy matched by those of antipathy. Unattended, hurt can fortify negative feelings while undermining the positive.

Missing Infrastructure

The barriers and risks of mentoring do not obviate its real usefulness as a strategy for aiding individual children. Identifying them, however, puts mentoring's broad-scale potential in perspective, correcting for the tendency to acknowledge only its more uplifting aspects.

In most instances, mentoring is, in fact, falling short of its potential. Built-in obstacles are compounded by a considerable lack of infrastructure in the field. Programs are struggling to implement publicized models, and actual practice is uneven.

Most sorely missing is follow-up. While marketing and recruitment have proceeded apace, program support is often neglected. Mentors find themselves matched, then abandoned; oversight is commonly delegated to overburdened school counselors; all too often, the entire enterprise is held together by sheer force of will on the part of dedicated founders.

One of the great ironies of mentoring is that this strategy, so often sold as a corrective to the isolation of youth, is so often conducted in isolation. One mentor explains his surprise about "the degree to which I've been all alone in this." An observer of mentoring programs notes that "few programs have the resources to serve mentors as well as mentees."

While the absence of resources is perhaps most conspicuous, also commonly missing are operational experience, knowledge regarding effective practice, and an appreciation--more by those outside than inside programs--of how hard it is to put mentoring into action. The absence of program infrastructure, made much worse by pressures to grow quickly and produce miraculous results, compromises mentoring's real potential to help.

In sum, while recent years have seen a significant increase in mentoring activity, and while some youth are undoubtedly being helped in some ways by mentors, a set of sobering cautions are in order. Mentoring is nowhere near the mass movement of millions that is often envisioned, and it is unlikely ever to be such a movement--the enterprise is simply too difficult and demanding. In addition, many relationships--perhaps two-thirds, perhaps even more--simply do not take hold. Furthermore, even in the cases where relationships between adults and youth do form, these bonds are just one influence amid many on the lives of the youngsters. In practice, few lives are transformed. And finally, it is imperative to recognize the risks inherent in engineering relationships, particularly when trying to do so across a great social divide.

VIII. MENTORING'S CROSSROADS

The mismatch between mentoring's rhetoric and its modest results is not surprising, given the developmental stage of the mentoring field. The movement is in its infancy, and such start-up periods, as the experience of Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Friendly Visiting well attest, are renowned for overheated marketing. The primary objective is getting people's attention, and mentoring has undoubtedly succeeded on this score.

The disparity between rhetoric and reality is further to be expected, given the history of the mentoring concept in our culture. Mentoring inspires hyperbole, as the fervor that attended the corporate wave confirms.

FERVOR WITHOUT INFRASTRUCTURE

As predictable as the gulf between rhetoric and reality might be and as justifiable over the short term, the overselling of mentoring is quickly becoming a liability. It contributes to an approach that one observer calls "fervor without infrastructure."[1] Fervor without infrastructure amounts to social policy as a kind of media event, the outlook that problems will go away in response to enough inspirational stories, no matter how much they are the exception, and of heroic acts on the part of well-intentioned individuals.

Fervor without infrastructure is dangerous. It is dangerous at the program level because it leads to disappointed mentors and youth. It is dangerous at the policy level because it plays into the unfortunate tendency to lunge at new and glossy strategies, glorify them over the short term, and discard them as they tarnish.

More disturbing is the way fervor without infrastructure plays into the current appetite for voluntarist panaceas, idealized in isolation from institutions, proposed as quick, cheap and easy. As such, mentoring becomes a tool that distracts attention from deep-seated problems that cannot be marketed away.

Fervor without infrastructure is a set-up for failure and will inevitably lead mentoring to become just another good idea that did not work out. This pattern recalls the demise of Friendly Visiting, which rapidly ran the familiar cycle from initial enthusiasm to bewildered disappointment. It is worth remembering that Friendly Visiting was undermined by enormous expectations in combination with a dearth of volunteers, difficulties in forging relationships across great social distance, and worsening economic circumstances.

The big losers in this cycle of disappointment will, of course, be disadvantaged youth, robbed yet again of a potential source of support. Indeed, in a number of locations, there are already indications that just such a cycle may be playing out.

In Cleveland, Career Beginnings has been dropped by several corporations whose unrealistic expectations have not been fulfilled. Program director Al Abromowitz says that in these instances, "if we had 10 mentors, there'd be a couple of magics and two or three others who were connecting." The rest were running into frustration. As a result, the corporations just pulled out. Abromowitz reflects, "If we don't meet the dream, they'll go on to something else."

In Milwaukee, after an early evaluation of the One on One program found the effort performing weakly against dramatic goals, the Milwaukee Journal ran the headline, "New project gets so-so grades: Mentor program fails to raise most pupils' performance." In response to this disappointment, the Milwaukee business community withdrew funding for the program's field staff positions.[2]

In Washington, a few days after Elizabeth Dole and others rose to the podium at the National Mentoring Conference to praise mentoring, Dorothy Gilliam issued another column in The Washington Post, one year after her original "SOS." This piece, titled "Mentoring Has its Limitations," states: "There is, in my view, a dangerous trend to look at mentoring as the be-all and end-all, as the solution to a social ill, as THE answer to so-called 'at-risk' youth."

Gilliam's perspective came not only from the claims she heard at the conference, but from her own experience with the SOS program, which had taught her the limitations of mentoring. To Gilliam, "Circumstances in some teenagers' lives made it difficult for them to accept our outreach....some of us expected too much. Some matches were instant successes, but others took time and patience just to develop trust."

A year earlier, she had written about thousands of youth at a crossroads. Now she described mentoring itself as "at a crossroads." Warning that mentoring is being oversold, the columnist concludes: "It can either blossom into a useful social tool or, like a comet that crosses the social scene, plummet and die."[3]

MAKING THE MOST OF MENTORING

Mentoring represents a unique opportunity because of its gift for grabbing people's attention--including adults beyond those traditionally interested in the circumstances of disadvantaged children and youth--and directing it toward the provision of a potentially useful service for such youngsters. It may be just as much a "master key" for reaching adults as youth.

The principal challenge facing the incipient mentoring movement, one essential for its development and survival, lies in finding an alternative route, on that might be called fervor with infrastructure. Taking this route will require a balancing act that modulates fervor while bolstering infrastructure to strike the healthy equilibrium between marketing and programming so lacking at present, and so essential for mentoring to flourish.

Modulating Fervor

Achieving this balance will require both less and a different kind of fervor. We need to shed the heroic view of mentoring, one built on the presumption that good-hearted adults can waltz in and quickly change the lives of at-risk youth. Instead of envisioning a cadre of supermentors, Kalman Hettleman, head of the Baltimore Mentoring Institute, advises planning for average people, and accepting that mentoring with real people will not produce automatic results. It will require care, time, resources and a tolerance for ambiguity and failure.

Echoing Hettleman's realism, a group of mentoring practitioners states: "Mentoring--which is a popular idea at the moment--must not be seen as a 'cheap fix' or a 'substitute for funding of social services' nor as a 'primary tool' for repairing society's ills."[4]

The marketers of mentoring need to reflect this new perspective, advertising mentoring's ability to help some youth in some ways, and the profound commitment that mentoring requires. Mentoring might well be looking for "a few good men and women," especially at this stage of the game.

It is particularly necessary to jettison the goal of dramatic numbers that has been so dominant in the mentoring field. The push for a million mentors, a mentor for every youth, is counter-productive in the extreme. First, it is unrealistic to believe that such a large number of people prepared to mentor seriously are going to appear; second, actually achieving this goal would be even more distressing. No structure exists to match, supervise and support these mentors. Most likely, they would be thrown at kids in an approach that one practitioner has likened to "blind dating as social policy."

In place of the numbers game, the goal must be shifted to one of quality and balance. The mentoring movement is best served by careful and responsible growth, given the scarcity of funding and the difficulty of the enterprise.

Bolstering Infrastructure

To close the gap between mentoring rhetoric and reality, the group of mentoring practitioners quoted earlier urges not only

more sober expectations, but more responsible programming. They call for developing what one calls "the art of mentoring" for taking seriously the delivery of services. This critical and growing interest in quality mentoring is being encouraged through a proliferation of manuals, conferences and practitioner networks, a set of supports that comes none too soon.[5]

Sturdy knowledge about how and why mentoring works is still at least a few years away, but some common-sense wisdom about best practices is slowly beginning to emerge: the following eight are drawn from observations of program trial and error, the few shards of in-depth research, and the distillation of insights presented in the new manuals.

1. Recognizing the Needs of At-Risk Youth

The experiences of mentoring programs strongly suggest that it is much more difficult to serve youth on the edge than good students in need of enrichment, and that programs must be designed with the difference in mind. If mentoring programs want to serve the truly disadvantaged, they must be both intensive and extensive, start early and plan to stick around for a long time. They must also be prepared for inevitable failures and be ready to intervene when problems arise and relationships do not take hold.

For this reason, a great many programs have opted not to serve the most at-risk students. However, it is worth noting that programs serving B and C students have found that even youth perceived as at less risk often confront far more obstacles than anticipated, and are in many cases in danger of dropping out.

2. Preparing Youth

While mentoring is a familiar concept in the world of middle-class adults, it is often a foreign concept to disadvantaged adolescents. When told that they are being assigned a mentor, many youth are resistant or bewildered. Some undoubtedly wonder, suggests social support scholar Benjamin Gottlieb, "what does this say about me--that I need help? That I am deficient?"

Programs have experienced success orienting students to the mentoring concept prior to the matchmaking process--working to avoid misconceptions and training young people to make the most of the experience. Some programs go even further, engaging the adolescents being mentored as mentors themselves, pairing them up with local elementary school students.

These so-called "tripartite" programs, exemplified by the Young Leaders program of Mentors, Inc. in Washington, D.C., have numerous advantages. Not only do they support the elementary school children, they also provide participating adolescents with the experience of being mentors themselves. Furthermore, since many

of these programs match adolescents and elementary school children growing up in the same neighborhoods, they can also be seen as community-development strategies.

3. Screening Out, Not Screening In

Programs should be careful about the mentors they enlist. As Al Abromowitz explains, he "fell in love with the myth of mentoring" in the first year that he ran the Cleveland Career Beginnings site and pushed for big numbers. People would come to the program "expecting that they're going to save the world...and we fed them on that...reinforced it."

However, as the program struggled through the first years and many of these individuals dropped out, Abromowitz and his staff shifted away from screening people in, to screening them out, letting them know about the harder realities of mentoring from the start so that only those individuals really committed would become involved. According to Abromowitz, "We lost some people--the total number of mentors we could claim in the program went down--but the percentage actually performing went up."

4. Considering Race, Class and Love

Common ethnic and racial ties appear to be an advantage in forging connections as those ties mitigate barriers to trust and provide youth with role models that look like them. However, common ethnic or racial background is no guarantee of success.

In fact, common class backgrounds between mentors and students may be even more important. Several studies of mentoring programs have concluded that the most successful mentors are commonly individuals who have weathered "hard lives," growing up in the same way as the youth, often coming from the same neighborhoods, and able to talk to them in their own language.[6] The life experiences of these mentors can provide more accessible and realistic models for the youth.

However, despite the importance of race and class commonality, there is virtual consensus among program operators that "love matters most." It is the adults who become involved because they enjoy spending time with young people, rather than because they feel compelled to save youth from poverty, who seem to make the greatest strides.

5. Scheduling Enough Time Together

There is no substitute for mentors and students logging consistent time together. As Ronald Ferguson finds, "Even though a child may settle for what he can get, a minimum of one interaction per week of at least a few hours in duration seems to be the standard for programs where adults play major supplemental

parenting roles."[7] If the goal of the mentoring program is simply exposure to middle-class roles and role models, the occasional contact may suffice. However, if the objective is a significant relationship between an adult and a youth, then Ferguson's parameters are best seen as irreducible.

6. Setting Up Tasks as Scaffolding

One practitioner states: "It would be wonderful if we could just put these two people together and tell them to relate, but it's not realistic."[8] In her experience, when mentors and mentees have something to do or work on together, it gives them more direction. Tasks can absorb initial nervous energy, provide a basis for conversation between partners and diffuse the stigma of receiving help.

The key is finding the right task--one that interests both parties. Hamilton and Hamilton argue that the workplace is ideal, but admit that finding the right tasks for early adolescents can be more elusive.[9] While tutoring is often the medium selected, this arrangement can be stultifying, since the parties must stop tutoring in order to converse. In contrast, community service projects, (such as the Boston University/ Roxbury Middle School collaboration, a Campus Partners in Learning site) in which mentors and students are working side by side, can provide an environment conducive to interchange.

7. Supportir Mentors

Although there are differing views among practitioners about the value of upfront training of mentors, most agree that some kind of orientation to adolescence and urban poverty is a good idea. But program operators are unequivocal about the importance of supporting mentors and the consequences of failing to do so.

In order to combat the isolation in which much mentoring is conducted, some initiatives have begun organizing self-help groups for mentors to provide each other with emotional support, share experiences and develop solutions to common difficulties. Mentoring teams, where several adults share the difficult job of mentoring several youth, have also helped reduce isolation in some programs. The team structure is used, for example, by the Washington, D.C. law firm of Latham and Watkins in its mentoring program with Hine Junior High School. As an added advantage, the teams help provide consistency for youth. When one of the adults cannot make it to a scheduled session, the youth can still expect to see one or two of the other mentors on the team.

8. Staffing Carefully

The most important source of support for mentors is also the most important single ingredient in successful mentoring programs:

field staff. These individuals are in contact with the kids, the mentors, school staff and families. Not surprisingly, in programs where such staff are a full-time presence, the whole mentoring process tends to revolve around them; they are the "glue" in the mentoring process.

Field staff assume many critical functions, from helping make sure that people show up, to brokering and interpreting for adults and youth, to serving as "mentors to the mentors." In part, these youth workers support youth, often with the advantages of social and physical proximity to the young people. Many come from socioeconomic backgrounds similar to the youth and set up shop right in the schools that the young people attend.

While some programs try to subsist on volunteer coordination, usually by already overworked school counselors, experience suggests that employing full-time youth workers in this role is a far more effective path.

Toward a More Solid Movement

The eight guidelines suggested here are neither definitive nor comprehensive, but point to ways that the mentoring process can be made more responsible and less risky. We have a long way to go before we can lay claim to "the art of mentoring." Fortunately, there appears to be some growing awareness that it is important to move in this direction quickly. A new generation of research studies, intended to assess the viability of various program strategies, is welcome evidence of that awareness.

Although the mentoring movement emerged partly as a reaction to the imposing standards of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters movement, there is much that mentoring might learn from this pioneer of one-to-one programs. Ensuring the quality delivery of service, building a track record for reliability, and developing ongoing sources of funding are among the priorities that mentoring programs would do well to consider.

Perhaps the most basic lesson is simply that there is no substitute for infrastructure. Without it, all that remains is fervor. And fervor alone is not only evanescent and insufficient, but potentially treacherous.

IX. THE IMPLICATIONS OF MENTORING

The basic question about mentoring is whether its inherent appeal will be squandered in rhetorical excess or harnessed in responsible programming--in short, whether this movement can move to its next stage of operational and organizational development.

However, the issue of mentoring prompts a further question, one that is more abstract in nature. Volunteer movements are as important for what they express--the issues they raise--as for what they address in direct programming. What does mentoring express? The movement is particularly compelling in this regard.

As previous chapters have underscored, mentoring is about two ideas: the potential of relationships, instrumentally deployed to help poor kids; and the potential of voluntarism practiced by middle-class adults, to engage the disadvantaged. These two elements are familiar partners in past movements aimed at urban reform. However, they strike a particularly timely chord in the current social and educational environment.

Schools and social programs for the disadvantaged are all too often impersonal and bureaucratic at a juncture when youth are getting little nurturance from informal sources. These institutions are bereft of much outside support and advocacy as the middle class continues its retreat from the urban centers.

Mentoring draws our attention to important issues for social policy: how to provide young people with the relationships with adults they so badly need, and how to engage the middle class in addressing poverty problems. By raising these issues, mentoring challenges us to go further, beyond what this form of voluntarism can realistically attain as a discrete strategy by itself.

EXTENDING RELATIONSHIPS

Closing the gap between fervor and infrastructure will help mentoring programs better address disadvantaged youth's need for adult contact and strengthen the support available to adults who provide that contact. However, it would be a mistake either to underestimate the extent of these needs or to overestimate the power of voluntary efforts to meet them. As one program operator warns, "You're not going to have enough mentors. It's not going to work for a lot of kids. There will be a huge hole."

This hole will continue to exist, even if those pushing for responsible volunteer mentoring prevail, because the isolation of youth is a structural problem resulting from a set of fundamental changes. There are neighborhoods that supply few adult models and supports for youth, and schools and other institutions, like social programs, do not seem to be compensating for this. As

these institutions are ever more squeezed for resources, their inadequacies particularly affect disadvantaged children and youth. Proposing to solve a structural problem of this magnitude through the good will and kindness of volunteers, particularly middle-class professionals already overburdened by their own work and family commitments, is not realistic.

Rather than thinking of volunteer mentoring as a sufficient solution to the problem of youth isolation, we would do well to think of the mentoring movement as a potentially important step in the right direction, one that highlights an unmet need, goes part of the way toward redressing it, and calls out for reinforcements.

It is important to be clear about the unmet need. Most young people growing up in poverty are not "little managers," simply requiring some strategic advice, a role model, a few networking opportunities. While opportunities and ties are to be encouraged, and may be of particular value to those disadvantaged students who are doing well already, a great many disadvantaged youth are in need of support that is developmental, nurturing, protective and extensive in nature--in other words, something resembling supplemental parenting.

They need this caring not only to make the basic transition to adulthood, but to survive under conditions of great stress. The role of their parents in this struggle is obviously primary, and we need to strengthen support for these adults in their parenting duties. However, as sociologist Joyce Ladner remarks, given the stressful circumstances so many inner-city youth face, most could use three or four parents.

The rise of mentoring reminds us that there is a role for unrelated adults in this process and challenges us to deploy volunteer mentors in a manner that will complement and enhance the family. However, mentoring's rise challenges us as well to think of the role other unrelated adults--beyond middle-class volunteers--can play in the enterprise of supporting disadvantaged children.

Staff as Mentors

Mentoring programs themselves provide essential clues about where we might look beyond volunteers. These clues come from their field staff, many of whom form powerful mentoring relationships with participating youth.

Erik Butler, who helped design and direct Career Beginnings, points out that "in a lot of Career Beginnings programs, the primary relationships are between the case managers and the kids, and only secondarily and maybe supportively between the mentors and the kids."

Butler's position is echoed by Ronald Ferguson, who came away from examining community-based programs for young black males with a similar impression. According to Ferguson, the mentors in the programs he studied are "sometimes volunteers, but more often they are paid staff members who teach, broker resources, and provide supplemental parenting in what they characterize frequently as 'love' and 'extended-family' relationships."[1]

In this way, volunteer mentoring programs often function as back doors to traditional youth work: the need to administer the program serves as justification for hiring adult staff who themselves come to provide the most critical mentoring delivered by the program. Back door or not, the role many staff come to play underscores the basic insight that mentoring, while cast as voluntary relationship, is by no means the exclusive province of volunteers. In fact, mentoring points us inexorably to the realm of staff and institutions, to the settings where disadvantaged young people already spend much of their time.

Mentor-Rich Environments

Volunteer mentoring, then, can be seen as one example of an approach to helping youth, an approach that extends beyond the volunteer sphere.

As opposed to the numbers game of volunteer mentoring--the call for millions of volunteer mentors--the mentoring approach can best be advanced by creating more opportunities in schools and social programs for young people to interact with an array of caring adults. In creating mentor-rich environments,[2] we will need to fill them not only with volunteer mentors, who constitute one link in what one observer calls the continuous chain of caring, but also with teachers, coaches, supervisors, youthworkers, counselors, social workers and other adults who have the time and inclination to establish close ties with young people.

Creating mentor-rich schools, social programs and youth organizations is one way of moving beyond the chimera of "supermentoring," in which a single charismatic adult is called on to be a heroic influence, providing for all the young person's needs in one relationship.

Furthermore, young people exposed to mentor-rich settings might well be in a position to avoid many of the vicissitudes of formal, matched, volunteer mentoring. Rather than being assigned an adult and instructed to form a one-to-one bond with this elder, young people in mentor-rich environments would find ample opportunities for natural mentoring to occur. In such settings, young people are in a position to select the right mentor at the right time, pick mentors for different reasons and experience aspects of mentoring from a variety of sources. In the process, youth might encounter a mix of primary and secondary relationships,

with some providing the "master key" and others affording discrete types of help. The vision presented here is of young people exposed to a varied "portfolio" of caring adult relationships over time.

It stands to reason that harder-to-reach youth might particularly benefit from these settings, where there would be many more opportunities to establish trust naturally on a daily basis.

The Caring Context

Through numerous pragmatic suggestions for increasing access to adult contact, policymakers, researchers and practitioners have recognized the need to create a context in which youth can connect with adults. These recommendations have ranged from drastically cutting student/teacher and student/counselor ratios to creating a direct-service, youth worker corps, based in urban settings and drawing a cadre of adults who would resemble the field staff in mentoring programs.[3]

These proposals also include more sweeping visions of reform, a compelling example among them being the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development's plan for transforming the country's middle schools, Turning Points. The Council's study advocates the creation of "communities of learning" in these middle schools, based on a three-tiered plan: cutting schools down into smaller units; engaging youth and adults in teams; and instituting one to one "advisor" systems. Carnegie Corporation President David Hamburg states: "The transformed middle school would provide time and a structure for teachers and other professional staff to become mentors and advocates for students."[4]

Like mentoring, the plan that the Carnegie Council endorses evokes warm-hearted sentiments. However, there appears to be more here than sentimental appeal. Not only are such approaches supported by theories of adolescent development, but by a growing body of research emerging from effective schools and social programs.[5]

This research suggests that it is precisely the institutions that are able to foster bonds between adults and youth--that are able to create an environment that encourages relationships, personal attention and caring--that have the best track records in helping youth. In other words, the principles of mentoring may well be among the most important common denominators across effective programs for disadvantaged youth. In the words of Erwin Flaxman, mentoring may amount to the "DNA" in successful youth programming.

As Professor Elizabeth Useem summarizes: "Over and over again, what we hear from those who work directly with troubled youth," is that programs must emphasize "individualized caring" function-

ing, "in short, very much like family environments."[6] Indeed, these family-like environments seem to be the active ingredient in a wide array of effective schools and social programs, numbering among them Deborah Meier's Central Park East schools and James Comer's schools in New Haven and elsewhere. These are all initiatives where, in the words of the Hispanic Policy Development Project, "caring had been institutionalized as a value in the school and not solely an accidental relationship between a teacher and a lucky student."[7]

Another Crossroads

The widening interest in personalizing the settings where youth spend their time constitutes good news. But these signs only point out the road ahead.

Getting any distance down that road will be a formidable challenge. The first requirement will be new thinking about how best to foster nurturing relationships for youth--thinking that must surmount the impulse to segregate caring functions exclusively in specialized positions like the school counselor or that of volunteers. However the most formidable challenge will be not in the realm of thinking, but that of finding hard cash.

One of the best illustrations of this challenge is offered by advisor systems, like those advocated by the Carnegie Council. As school principal Thomas Edwards points out, structural measures like advisors cost money: "If...public school teachers are already overburdened with teaching loads and institutional requirements, where can they find the time to take on new responsibilities?" The answer is, they can't; and this is the biggest reason the vast majority of advisory systems are located in wealthy school districts. In order to advise a student, Edwards continues, "more teachers would have to be hired to teach the sections left uncovered as staff members devote time to advising.... Thus, economics hinders the spread of advising systems in public schools."[8]

As awareness grows about the importance of adult relationships for youth in the institutions increasingly entrusted with their education, nurturance and development, we continue to undercut their ability to provide such support. If anything, we are moving in the opposite direction: cutting staff, clearing away all but the most essential roles, burdening the remaining adults with so many formal responsibilities that forming relationships with struggling young people, or bringing in volunteers to do so, becomes a virtual impossibility.

A compelling irony of the new mentoring movement is that this strategy, pursued by many as a cheap fix, not only costs money to do responsibly, but leads logically to a set of reforms that are among the most costly imaginable. Valuing human resources is

expensive; any doubt about that connection is quickly dispelled by calculating the cost of reducing student/teacher ratios. These costs are currently beyond our political will to pay.[9]

So youth policymakers have a choice. We can continue to pursue purely voluntarist strategies to provide the personal attention so badly needed by our young, particularly those growing up in poverty. Or we can view voluntary mentoring as a starting point, one step in a necessary set of humanizing reforms that will make our schools and social programs better places for youth.

Should we choose to cling to voluntarism as our principal strategy, we must at least be willing to acknowledge that we are not likely to lessen the profound isolation of our young people in anything but a modest and glancing fashion. This admission will have the advantage not only of honesty, but of freeing mentoring from the burden of expectations that, realistically, it can never fulfill.

SETTING THE STAGE

While meeting the needs of youth for caring adult contact will require moving beyond the sphere of voluntarism, it is essential that volunteer mentoring itself--and the wider notion of middle-class engagement in the problems of disadvantaged youth--not be lost in the quest to enact a broader set of humanizing reforms. Volunteer mentors constitute not only a link in the caring chain, but a force to help mobilize our social will.

At present, the middle-class public has little contact with and little immediate stake in young people in poverty or in the institutions set up to serve them. As Nicholas Lemann points out, ever since "the riots of the 1960s, a quite elaborate social reorganization of American metropolitan life has taken place, based on the principle of everybody getting as far away from the underclass as possible."[10]

Out of sight, the concerns of these young people have for the most part been out of mind. Indeed, nowhere is the problem of middle-class disengagement more evident than in the urban public schools, which are reeling in the wake of a middle-class exodus. Against this backdrop, mentoring offers one of the few opportunities in our society for bringing adults from the social and economic mainstream into direct contact with disadvantaged youth.

In this capacity, mentoring can function as a program for adults: adults who are in many respects just as isolated and disconnected as the youth targeted by mentoring programs. Many adults are cut off from school children in a society sharply segregated by age, separated from public life and civic duty in a nation where active citizenship has eroded badly, and protected from poverty in a country ever more sharply divided by class. These mainstream

adults are as removed from the reality of poverty as poor children are from the experience of middle-class life.

As a program for adults, mentoring is built around the power of direct experience. Decent and caring people, good-hearted adults nevertheless inured to the realities of poverty, are brought face to face with the unfair manner in which poverty afflicts innocent children. Some are moved to wonder how they or their children would respond under similar circumstances. These empathic responses, fueled by an offended sense of fairness, present an opportunity to build both stake and advocacy.

The route from direct contact to empathy to stake, described by mentors in every program, raises historian Christopher Lasch's point that Americans do not maintain abstract affinity well: "The capacity for loyalty is stretched too thin when it tries to attach itself to the hypothetical solidarity of the whole human race. It needs to attach itself to specific people and places....We love particular men and women, not humanity in general."[11]

The experience of mentoring suggests a variant on Lasch's point. Our capacity to take responsibility for strangers and the future, perhaps nowhere better embodied than in disadvantaged youth, is so badly atrophied that it can only be reconstructed by moving from the general to the specific, and back to the general. As anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson states: "Every adult needs a relationship with a flesh and blood child, so that we can imagine what it will be like as that child's life unfolds into the future." For Bateson, we need to return to "the elementary school of caring."[12]

Mentoring provides a specific context in which to initiate the process of reconstructing the empathy that is essential for building not only better policies and institutions for poor youth, but also a good and civil society. It amounts to an elementary school of caring for <u>other people's children</u>, the children of the poor.

As part of such a process, mentoring becomes an opportunity for reform. Dean Patricia Albjerg Graham of the Harvard Graduate School of Education argues that, historically, volunteer movements like mentoring, while unable to provide fundamental reform in and of themselves, have often "set the stage so that fundamental reform becomes more likely." Graham believes these movements are valuable because they build a sense of stake among the enfranchised who come to provide poor children with "new and powerful advocates for the schooling they need."[13] Indeed, this objective has been an important stimulus to the creation of mentoring programs.

THE CHALLENGE OF REENGAGEMENT

Privately, program sponsors admit that a central part of their mission is alerting middle-class adults to the circumstances of poor children and reengaging them. This having been said, some obvious caveats are in order.

First, mentoring is risky. Direct contact is a double-edged sword. This section has highlighted its constructive potential; but as earlier sections contend, direct contact can backfire, reinforcing stereotypes and prompting disengagement.

Second, the barriers of poverty are formidable, and individual outrage at these conditions on the part of mentors can as easily lead to hopelessness as to advocacy. Some mentors find themselves feeling, as already mentioned, "like a drop in the bucket."

Third, large numbers of mentor/advocates are unlikely. The prospect of a mass outcry for change emanating from transformed mentors seems fairly remote.

Nevertheless, there is much promise in mentoring as a vehicle for reengaging some adults, and of suggesting ways for getting the attention of others. The first step toward meeting the challenge is to meet an earlier one: conducting responsible mentoring. Mentors are much more likely to become reengaged if they are carefully screened, supported and supervised, and if there is quick intervention on the part of staff when things go wrong.

The second step is for mentoring programs to be less reticent about functioning as "social programs" for adults. While these efforts need not advertise themselves as adult initiatives, they could be far more proactive, taking a few lessons from the field of organizing. To start, programs could bring mentors together to share experiences and determine ways of acting in concert around issues of strong mutual concern. In particular, these sessions could focus on the often expressed desire of mentors to be part of a broader support network for the young people. Around this desire, mentors could be encouraged to press for the kinds of changes outlined in the preceding section.

The third step in this challenge actually moves past mentors to a wider circle of potentially engaged adults. While it is ill-advised to inflate the number of mentors unnaturally, mentoring might profitably be used to stimulate other avenues of direct engagement. The Philadelphia Futures program provides an example of how this potential might be tapped. While Philadelphia Futures uses mentoring to stimulate interest ("as the hook"), the program provides a menu of different ways for adults to become directly involved with youth, including tutoring, role-modeling, and other options. The program helps interested adults select

the particular role that is most compatible with their personality, interests and level of commitment.

In other words, in this approach, mentoring is just one way for caring adults to become involved. Without making every interested adult into a mentor, it may well be possible to increase the number who have contact with poor kids, come to understand their needs, have the opportunity to help, and feel an enhanced stake in their fate.

The final challenge of reengagement is to understand the appeal mentoring holds more broadly, for understanding this appeal might provide important clues for social policies and programs that are both saleable and sustainable.

At root, the appeal of mentoring is reflected in its essential principles of connection and responsibility, of relationship and participation. It is reflected as well in the words of mentors who speak of "recreating the extended family," of "restoring ...the individual and collective responsibility we used to owe to each other," of finding the missing "glue" of social cohesion.

These themes and principles add up to the notion of civil society, an attractive concept at a time when many have come to fear that we are living in an increasingly uncivil society, one threatening to deteriorate into something resembling the state of nature--what West Germans call "the elbow society."[14] It is possible to see the elements of civil society not only in mentoring but in a range of other extremely popular programs on the policy landscape: youth service, family support, and intergenerational and cooperative education efforts, to name a few.

These elements touch a welling sentiment in contemporary America, one concerned with resurrecting and preserving a set of social relationships perceived to be vanishing: ties between the generations, responsibility to strangers, a sense of community and the bonds of family.

As the broad appeal of mentoring and related efforts suggests, the notion of a civil society sells. It is a pitch that might well be used more aggressively, alongside prevailing arguments concerning the social costs of neglect. Taken together, these approaches could produce a case capable of transcending customary political divisions, and helping to rally the public will so essential to genuine reform.[15]

A WINDOW OF HOPE

This essay set out to provide a context for understanding the current interest in voluntarism as an approach to relieving social problems through examining one of the most prominent exam-

ples of this phenomenon: the new and much celebrated mentoring movement.

In the end, one of the principal lessons emerging from this examination is that mentoring, like the broader interest in voluntarism, constitutes an empty vessel, one whose social significance will depend ultimately on how we elect to fill it.

At present, this significance remains uncertain.

One possible outcome is troubling. It is built around the counterposition of voluntary action and public institutions--of the "good" and the "great" societies--proposing the former as a cheap and easy substitute for the latter. This inclination, exemplified by the fervor without infrastructure school of mentoring, is reminiscent of Friendly Visiting's slogan, "Not Alms, But a Friend," with its anachronistic faith in the sufficiency of well-meaning volunteers.

As this essay has argued, there are alternatives to the overselling--and the consequential undermining--of voluntarism. Through responsible practice, sufficient resources, and realistic expectations, movements like mentoring can be sustained and constructive additions to the landscape, joining a tradition carried on by sturdy efforts like those of Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Within limits already suggested, mentoring can engage a new cadre of adults on behalf of our nation's most vulnerable youth.

This essay further contends that, at their best, volunteer movements not only augment direct assistance to the disadvantaged, but serve as catalysts for more encompassing reform. As mentoring illustrates, they can point to needed institutional changes and can even help build a constituency for these public improvements. In other words, the "good" and "great" societies need not be counterposed, but can be organized to complement and reinforce one another.

For all these reasons, the mentoring movement, like the new voluntarism, contains the potential to be, in the words of one mentor, "a window of hope" at a time when few such windows are open. The movement offers a glimpse not only of our better selves, but of a potentially better society, one built not only on individual acts of kindness, but on a broader set of programs, policies and institutions that themselves reflect a higher civility.

AFTERWORD ON SOURCES AND OBJECTIVES

This paper is an essay about the mentoring movement anchored by more than 300 semistructured, face-to-face interviews with mentors, youth, staff, program operators, foundation officials, scholars and policymakers, which were conducted around the country beginning in Fall 1989.

Unless footnoted, all quotes in this essay derive from these interviews. The quotations have been edited and condensed in some places, but always with the objective of preserving spirit and meaning. In the case of mentors and youth, all names have been changed, unless the data comes from public materials.

Although a dozen initiatives were visited, the majority of the interviews with mentors, youth and staff were conducted at five programs, located in Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Milwaukee and Cleveland. These initiatives were selected because they were fairly large (recruiting more than 100 mentors each), drawing an ethnically diverse group of mentors, focusing on at-risk youth, maintaining a reputation for innovation and excellence, and affording a look at a variety of institutional affiliations. Each of the five programs, Project RAISE, Mentors, Inc., Philadelphia Futures, One on One and Career Beginnings, is described in greater detail in Section IV.

In gathering information for this essay--a case study of the entire mentoring movement rather than of specific mentoring programs--considerable time was spent interviewing proponents of and commentators on mentoring beyond the program sphere, following the marketing of the movement and its coverage in the media, and functioning as a participant/observer at conferences and meetings focused on mentoring.

Finally, an extensive literature review was conducted, examining mentoring in the realm of social programs and policy, as well as the disciplines of literature, popular culture, psychology and career development.

In weaving these sources together, this essay was written to serve a wide audience, ranging from academics and policymakers to program staff and participants. It further attempts to cover a broad swath of issues related to mentoring, at one level proposing ways to think about the new mentoring movement while simultaneously examining programmatic suggestions related to day-to-day operations.

Finally, in putting together an argument about mentoring, the author did not aspire to be "scientific" in the sense of providing evaluation research, but rather--through trying to listen closely to the people directly involved in the mentoring process--to "convey a sense of the field" and where it might be heading.

NOTES

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